

My year at the National University of Ireland, Maynooth (2011-2012)



Application and further organisation

After my application at University of Wuppertal, including the submission of my letter of intent and my CV and a short interview, I had to apply at the National University of Ireland, Maynooth (NUIM). I was getting support for all necessary steps that had to be done by the International Office (Akademisches Auslandsamt). Once I had applied, I had to fill out a learning agreement that had to be signed by both my home university and the university abroad. The learning agreement shows a preliminary list of your modules you are going to take abroad and is an assurance for transferring the respective credit points back to Germany. It is important that you get a signed learning agreement beforehand – this way, you will receive your Erasmus funding earlier. During the first weeks of my studying I was allowed to make any changes I would like provided that I got the signatures again; this time on the second page of the learning agreement. Furthermore, I previously applied for on-campus accommodation online, but getting one of these places is very unlikely. Besides the booking of a flight, the negotiating of an appropriate international health insurance and the applying for a student loan (Auslandsbafög), I had to think about a leave of absence, too. A leave of absence makes it possible to collect credit points abroad while the number of your study semesters pauses for that time. Having done all these bureaucratic necessities, I was ready to start into a year abroad filled with new experiences, cultural differences, and interesting acquaintances.

Arrival and accommodation

I arrived at the airport in Dublin at 11th September, 2011. Since a taxi is really expensive, I decided to make my way to Maynooth by bus and train. My first destination was a Bed&Breakfast. The owner warmly welcomed me and drove me around during the next days. She was also with me when I found my permanent accommodation. This story can be described as a coincidence, because when I was asking if there was any possibility for me getting a room on-campus (I was on the waiting list), my future landlady entered the Residence Office. We were directly introduced and went to the relevant apartment. I realized my luck only after a while. The apartment was new, very big, and directly across the road of the university grounds

which allowed me to be on the North Campus (new campus) in three minutes. My room was spacious with a bathroom of my own. I was living with two Irish boys and after a month with one French boy (lecturer) and still one Irish boy (student). We three got along with each other very well and I really enjoyed the living together. The landlady was lovely – not only did she get me a welcome package and a big birthday cake, she always asked if every machine worked properly and replaced defects immediately.

Studying at the NUIM

The National University of Ireland, Maynooth is Ireland's second oldest university. It consists of an old campus - the South campus - and a new one - the North campus. The South campus includes St. Patrick's College with its seminarians, the beautiful College Chapel, and John Paul II library. On the North campus one can find modern buildings like Iontas and John Hume or the new restaurant and sports centre Phoenix. All buildings are close together and one can walk within a few minutes from one campus to the other.



Since I had almost finished my Bachelor programme at the University of Wuppertal, I used

the studying in Maynooth for trying various subjects at the NUIM. In my first semester, I took many psychology and education modules, which fit into my Master programme, attended some literature modules and a translation module. In the second semester, I continued with education and literature. Moreover, I did an apprenticeship at an Irish all-girls primary school which was an excellent and worthwhile experience for my teaching practice. The assessment at university always depends on the individual module. I wrote some essays, but mostly exams. Unfortunately, after my first semester, I had to write all exams in one week and I had to start with two in one day. However, it worked out well.

In addition to a great variety of subjects, NUIM offers many different clubs and societies one can join. For International and Erasmus students the International Society is the most important one. Besides the weekly presentation of various movies, we did a lot of trips organized by the International Society. Travelling as a big community was great. We went on numerous day and weekend trips, e.g. to Glendalough in the Wicklow Mountains, Galway City, plus Aran Islands, Burren/Cliffs of Moher. A day trip to Kilkenny Castle and Town, the Belfast weekend trip which allowed us to visit The Giant's Causeway, Cork City weekend trip with visits to Blarney Castle and the Southern coastal town, Kinsale. And also a final trip to Killarney which included day trips to the Killarney National Park, The Ring of Kerry, and Dingle Peninsula. There are many sport clubs available, too. I mainly participated in the Boxing Club and the Athletics Club. You can use the campus gym for free or go swimming. The clubs and societies cover almost all interests one can imagine.

Things to do during leisure time

The clubs and societies mentioned before can occupy a high amount of your leisure time. Between your lectures you can always meet your friends for lunch or a cup of coffee in one of the numerous facilities on and off campus. In the evenings it is usual to go to a pub. In Maynooth, you can spend legendary Thursday nights in The Roost. Another famous pub with a dance floor is Brady's. The one and only disco is Mantra. Once you have experienced these locations you will always have the possibility of going to Dublin. You definitely have to visit the district called Temple Bar. The atmosphere in the pubs there combined with traditional Irish music is more than words can say.

Conclusion

As a result, I would like to point out that I strongly recommend a year abroad to any student studying a foreign language. It was very important for me to live my life completely in English, e.g. getting up and starting the day with an English conversation in the kitchen, spending the day at university, going shopping, and meeting friends in order to watch a movie etc. The experience of studying at NUIM was great. It is interesting to compare study programmes, modules, and teachers with your home university. Moreover, the studying of all subjects in English was the best method for improving my English.

Maynooth was and is the perfect location for spending a year abroad. I always felt very welcomed and people told me so as well. I liked the small village and its people and learned a lot about their attitudes in comparison to German ones. An important point that influences my evaluation was definitely the flat share which had worked out perfectly. All in all, I loved to stay for one year in Maynooth (without any interruption). The experiences I gained are definitely one of the best I have ever made and I will always think back to that time with

positive and inspired feelings.