

# Questions for Final Report – By Marie McGirr

Semester exchange programme at PH Zug

## 1. Support

### • From PH Zug / the International Office

The support from the PH Zug was fantastic in my opinion. Everyone made an effort to be kind and speak English to us which was so helpful to incoming students. Unfortunately, in secondary/(high school) I studied French – so I never studied German. However, the people here were so encouraging when I did speak German.

The office was very helpful, and the staff and the cleaners would always say ‘Grüzie’ when we walked past which was very nice and inclusive.

If I had any queries via email the response was very quick too.

### • From your classroom teacher (if you completed the internship)

I had a fantastic experience with my classroom teacher. He was very helpful and was very good with his use of words. Whenever he had some advice, he made sure to compliment me but also suggest what I could do. He also gave me ample opportunities to help or observe and always asked what I was most comfortable with. My teacher was brilliant and taught me many new things. He supported me by giving me ideas for teaching and giving suggestions as to what I could do or how he would go about it. This helped hugely because I was able to try out his methods of teaching and experience his approach to teaching. I was surprised how much my two years of learning how to teach one way had impacted so much because it became my go-to. I had to try and reverse what I had been taught and allow myself to be open minded and try out this new method. My teacher was very supportive of me during this time. In Ireland if there is a new topic the teacher would inform the children here the teacher tried to find out the students Previous Related Knowledge (PRK) and it works very well.

### • From your buddy

My buddies were fantastic. One of them was also my German teacher and I have to say that that did help a lot because we got to spend more time with her, and it helped. We also had arranged time together and got to experience try authentic home-made Swiss German food and drink. You can also spot the Rivella in the top of the picture. She explained a lot about the culture as well because we got to spend a lot of time together. We also spent time together during Sport’s night and that was so fun. I would highly recommend doing that with your buddies in the future as you get to see everyone’s fun and competitive side. I also had a few questions during my stay and having someone’s contact number was comforting.



A traditional  
Swiss meal!

## 2. Accommodation and living situation (max. 1/3 A4 page)

- Finding accommodations, type of accommodations, cost
- Approximate monthly living costs



Living abroad for the first time. First things first, is you need to make the space you have a home. Because the first day we arrived we had to navigate the train and bus system we were rather slow so we missed the time for IKEA. Do although my instagram story looked like I was going on vacation.

That very night it was a different story sleeping on one blanket I had fortunately brought over with me and my Snuggie. This made me realise how important it is to have a good space. I think this is crucial because even as an Erasmus student with perhaps a 10kg full of clothes and bedclothes and a 20 kg filled with shoes, coats, and makeup. Bring something from home that reminds you of home. I brought some rose fairy lights and it made my room feel so cosy at night. It can be something small such as a poster of your favourite football team, or some images that speak to you of your friends back home. Do something that makes it feel like a home and you will be grateful because this will be your home for the next four months and you might as well make it pleasant.



We went to IKEA and bought some storage because my room was completely barren except for a mattress, a desk a bare overhead lamp, and a cupboard. So I bought some extension cords because there was only one plug in my room, and some cubes, a duvet, bed sheet and some pillows, a bin, bags, lunch boxes and so fourth. Things I could not bring over that were too bulky for a suitcase or too heavy. This all added up quick I think I spent 150 francs on these sorts of items and a mini lamp so the lighting wasn't so harsh.

So overall- On accommodation it is about 710 a month and our contract is for six months. GA card is around 300 each month. I spent a lot on food so I would say 40-70 quid weekly on shopping. 200 for creating a home buying pots and pans or basics. And 100 on new clothes for summer. I think then whatever you do is up to your discretion and however much budget you have. I also set aside a large amount of money for experiences. So, we tried out food here such as fondue – or we went on excursions on cable cars and going to different countries such as France, Germany and Italy.



Kunsthaus  
Zurich



Munich  
Residence



Classic Irish Dinner



Experiencing different food



Fondue in Switzerland is a given!!



Pilatus – Experiencing my first cable car!



Climbing up towers and churches



Trying my first Doner

Lindt Museum



We were in an unusual situation with Erasmus because I did not come alone, I came with four other friends and because there was such a large group of us and because we wanted to find a cheaper place. We had to search and email around different accommodations. This was quite hard to do because finding a cheap place near the college was difficult. However, we finally found a location that suited us all and wasn't too expensive. It was a student accommodation called Universe 9 that could hold us all and it wasn't too expensive. It was also equipped with a kitchen, and plenty of showers and bathrooms. Which for future students. However, since we lived outside of Zug and lived outside Luzern, we had to get a GA pass which is around 290 franc and after this month it has risen a little. Because we are only staying for four months, we can't benefit of the six month deal of the GA pass. So, you have to pay for each month if you are using a GA pass.

I have definitely gone through a lot of money on food to go because we were so busy and it is quick and convenient. I think living so far away does require you to get up earlier and the commute to and from is tiring and so after a while you do rely on convenience meals.

Migros is markedly cheaper than Coop which is something I didn't realise.

Food is what I have splurged on most after accommodation and transport.

Also, Switzerland's weather when we first arrived was so hot for ages that I had to buy a new wardrobe, so you really do have to pack for all seasons.

### **3. Overall programme**

- Programme at PH Zug (lectures etc.)
- Teaching practice programme
- Challenges you faced

#### **- Programme at Ph Zug**

I really enjoyed the programme available at Ph Zug. We had a lot of music courses available to us as it really fit with our timetable.

My favourite lessons without a doubt were our singing lessons. As a teacher, you are expected to teach children to sing in Nativity plays or end of year concerts. So, the teacher must be able to sing. I, at the start of the course was not great at singing and would sing out of tune. We worked on this this whole semester, and I am now much more comfortable with singing. I definitely feel more confident. I think I shall try and pick up some singing lessons back home.

My second favourite lecture that I had was speech and voice. As a teacher, you use your voice every day. This is not a module that is available back home so, I was extremely grateful to get the opportunity to participate.

#### **- Teaching practice Programme**

It was difficult to get used to at first because there is a lot of new things. New culture, new environment, different types of school education system, different education programme. A lot of this is new for anyone. I really think I benefitted from it though. It was a great experience and I definitely feel much more capable now because I have overcome all the challenges that were given to me. The teachers here were so supportive as well. They were absolutely amazing. They followed a child centred approach and I think that I too shall use this approach.

#### **- Challenges you faced**

Moving away from home is always a challenge as you are moving away from friends, family, home comforts and so much more. As well as that you are actively making the choice to go away and in a way that feels much more difficult because well you chose to do so.

You are very much on your own. You have to look after yourself constantly. From getting up in the morning, to preparing three meals a day to keeping on top of your academic work that is new as well as maintaining your mental health.

Something that I found difficult is that even though I had an amazing time. It was still difficult. Two truths can be the same at the one time. And much like the first picture I told you where if someone where to see my Instagram story they would think "Oh she is having an amazing time!" – it is still rather difficult.

You have to become more comfortable with yourself. Feeling lonely was a big one for me. I missed my dog and family awfully. That was extremely challenging. I don't think it gets any easier but you learn to have coping mechanisms in place. This is something that you just experience. I thought a lot about food. At home I had the opportunity at the weekends to have dinners made for me or leftovers or even simply having food in the kitchen and in the fridge. Over here it was all on you. Also because you are trying to be cheap I often ended up eating a lot of the same food.

- Personal evaluation of the stay

I thought it was a fabulous experience. I would rate it a 10/10 and I don't think I would change a thing. Whatever was negative was a growing experience and I am extremely grateful towards. I think having friends with me was the best thing because they were able to support me in a new country.

#### • **Benefit for your future studies and career**

It has made me more independent and feel much more capable than because I have experienced a lot of new things. It has taught me that it is ok to ask people for help. Google is your best friend because you can ask it anything. If you are unsure about anything you are not alone because someone has always asked it. Make use of your buddy that was given to you they are there to help you so be sure to make use of them.

You can be proud of yourself when you are done because you did something very challenging that not everyone can do. It is also very good for you Curriculum Vitae and job opportunities in the future.

You are also getting the opportunity to learn something new about a new system and methods of how to teach something. These are incredibly beneficial in the long run. They also teach you about different perspectives and you can learn a lot about this in a new culture and system.

Also, because you chose to do this, you actually become a lot more capable and tougher.

#### • **Recommendations for future students**

- Pack well if you can. Think about what you need in your everyday life because if you enjoy it at your home country, you will enjoy it here. For me, I knew that I wanted a cozy blanket, my favourite mug, my favourite tea, hot water bottle etc – these are things I can have whenever I have a bad day. I can confirm I have used these most of the times even when I am not having a bad day as it helps so much. Creating a routine is also important because it represents stability. Try and fall into a routine when you can.

- When you are having a bad day, try not to self isolate. It is super easy to fall into a negative spiral sometimes. If you can talk to your family and friends back home. Not everyone has a support system so try and find some whilst you are here. If you do not have a support system, try and find it with some new friends. When we feel sad sometimes all you want to do is curl up in your bedroom and not go near someone. However, it is in those moment that when we are down that is the most crucial. Going on a walk or going to a shop and interacting with at least someone. I would also say that Coby creating friends who are going through the same experience you are right now helps a lot because they can relate.

- Think about possible meal ideas or some staples that are important for cooking.

Mines is always having bread, butter, cheese, milk, frozen vegetables, potato's, chicken nuggets, cereal, herbs and spices such as garlic powder and pepper and a sweet treat. Having some staple

food in the house ensures you are well fed and looking after yourself. They can also be whipped up quickly particularly after a long day.

- Take it easy on yourself. Give yourself some grace and try not to be so hard on yourself.

Remember you are doing something not everyone has chosen.

You are going outside the box, going to a new culture away from friends and family and although it is a wonderful experience and I would do it again, it is definitely challenging.

Two things can be true at the same time though. It can be wonderful and difficult.

#### • **Personal evaluation and conclusion**

I thought that the courses provided here were wonderful and very practical in comparison to my home country where I would describe my teaching course to be very theoretical. I also enjoyed the continuous assessment more in comparison to the one big exam system that we have in place in Ireland because it wasn't as difficult. Although it was hard to maintain on top of everything constantly there were definitely times where it was much easier, and I enjoyed that aspect. I find my course back home to be very high intensity at the end and challenging because I struggle to formulate formal essays. Over here, there were a lot more writing journals where I could reflect on what I have learnt and that allowed me to write informally which I greatly appreciated.