

Report on my studies and life in Great Britain

To start with, I would like to thank the BCCG, the Anglo-German Club Hamburg and British Airways for their generous support of my studies at London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) in London, UK. Studying at LSE is very expensive and London as a city has the reputation to be amongst the most expensive cities in the world. Thus it would have been quite difficult to realise my plan to do a Masters in International Relations at this particular university without financial support.

The decision to go back to university was very well considered as I had already finished a diploma in Psychology and Political Science in Hamburg in 2007 and had worked for the last three years in a consultancy for organisation development in the non-profit and profit sector in Berlin. Additionally, I had done professional one-year trainings in conflict moderation and business coaching during the last years. So why should I go back to university again?

The answer seemed pretty straightforward to me: I wanted to widen my knowledge and skills in order to work in the international political arena and for doing that I needed more insights in international relations. LSE as an institution is suited perfectly for the study of International Relations (IR) as it is one of the best social science institutions in the world, and has the most international student and staff body. Last but not least it holds the oldest Chair for International Relations in the world, which has 'produced' a number of the most well known scholars in the subject, such as Martin Wight and Hedley Bull.

IR at LSE is a fascinating subject with a wide range of possible courses. Unfortunately, I had to find out in the first week of term that 5 courses would not be offered this year (two of them on International Organisations and Institutions had been on my short list). However, there were still enough interesting options so that my disappointment did not last very long. For an MSc IR one has to cover four full units during the year, which consist of one compulsory core course, International Politics, the dissertation, and for the remaining two credits students can choose between a wide range of full-unit and half-unit courses. I decided to take two full-units, Conflict and Peace Studies and Foreign Policy Analysis. All courses, but especially my two optional ones, are very interesting and I am happy with my course choices. Although I had already expected that my psychology and conflict management background would be useful for my courses, it is still surprising, how much I benefit from this knowledge. In Foreign Policy Analysis, lots of new research on foreign policy decision-making draws on cognitive and social psychological concepts and findings to improve understanding of how group dynamics, leadership, belief systems, ideas and identities shape foreign policy process and outcomes. In Conflict and Peace Studies, both my social psychology knowledge and my professional conflict management background are extremely useful as they help me to understand underlying dynamics in violent conflicts. Hence the merge of psychology and IR is extremely fruitful and I am planning to develop further insights on this intersection in my dissertation.

However, as I already said in the beginning, it is not only about the 'content' at LSE, it is also about the people. Both students and teachers come from all parts of the world, which makes it an intercultural experience on the everyday basis: I found new friends from India, China, Singapore, Australia, Ethiopia, France, Italy, Netherlands, United States, Russia, Finland, and Georgia - to name just a few... what a unique opportunity to meet so many different people with exciting backgrounds and stories!

Besides the 'official' courses, life at LSE has a lot to offer, which makes it hard to reserve moments for oneself without any events: there are numerous societies (for every nationality or culture, political affinity, food, dance, sport, etc), interesting talks with famous people from politics, business and academia, and the career service also always sets up workshops and career fairs that are free for students to improve their employability.

Having said all of this, nobody should make the mistake to study in London without exploring this extraordinary city itself: this huge, vibrant, international place is not only the capital of the UK - the legacy of having been the capital of a huge empire still evokes a very special

atmosphere. Behind every corner, you can find cultural and political events, historical buildings, and beautiful parks. And even cycling is no problem any more: cycle paths and special bike maps for free make it possible to cycle safely through London. When I used to live in London twelve years ago, this was almost impossible to even think of! For 'cycle fanatics', this is a huge improvement of the standard of living in London.

I was very lucky that my husband was so flexible to come with me to London. He is now doing his PhD at LSE as well, so we even have the same way to 'work', which is wonderful. We tried to get into LSE couple housing but unfortunately, they had lost our application. Our bad luck turned out to be a good destiny as - after a hideous one-week search all over London - we found a beautiful small flat in Angel, the nicest part of London for young people to live (very subjective, I admit, but true)! The only problem is the incredibly bad insulation of our sweet Victorian house. We do not have to open windows to get fresh air as the draft is strong enough anyway! And I can anticipate already our monstrous gas bill because of our constant heating during the entire wintertime.

The remaining year until the end of August will be at least as intense and interesting as the first term has been so far. I know already now how much I will benefit from this course in the future, both professionally and personally. I am very grateful for getting the opportunity to attain such a desirable degree from one of the best universities and to make so many new friends from all over the world!