



STUDYING ABROAD: NOT JUST FOR THE CV

STUDYING ABROAD ON AN ERASMUS EXCHANGE CAN BRING MANY BENEFITS, EXPLAINS **LYNSEY STEEL**

JOB prospects for chemical engineers across all sectors are excellent. A lucky few final-year students even procure a spot on a shiny graduate scheme before they've started to worry about purchasing Christmas presents. Making a good impression during an internship very often allows us to waltz across the bridge between academia and employment.

So, when presented with the opportunity to study abroad in a different language, quite frankly, why bother? After two years in a familiar system with a close-knit class and doting lecturers, is leaving it all behind a smart move? My answer: Yes.

I am a chemical engineering student at Heriot-Watt University,

and as I write this I'm about to embark on my fourth year. I chose to study at the École Nationale Supérieure des Industries Chimiques, (ENSIC), in Nancy, France for a period of five months. ENSIC is the only engineering school in France which holds IChemE accreditation, and is hence the only partner through which an Erasmus EU student exchange is possible in the country.

It was the toughest, most stressful time I could ever have imagined, but what I gained from the experience was invaluable. Strength, confidence, independence, friendship, international connections, a few life lessons and fluency.

I believe that attaining an

international perspective in your subject area is heavily underrated; speaking a foreign language even more so. More flexibility to learn other languages should be incorporated into engineering degrees. More often than not, international travel plays an integral part in our career, so why not take that into account before stepping into the world of work?

I believe there is an unintentional arrogance amongst native English speakers. Everyone else will speak English, so why put in the effort to learn a foreign language? I have learnt that a little bit of extra effort will always go a long way. Your meeting abroad will go that little bit better if you order your lunch in Japanese.

Personal development is just as important as knowledge and academic ability. Knowing how to solve a Redlich-Kwong calculation will not necessarily help you to shake hands on a business deal. The art of communication, conversation, negotiation, and combining our own unique, previous experiences with other cultures and ways of thinking may though.

ANOTHER WAY

An insight into another system gives you the ability to better evaluate your own. The French students I met had endured a gruelling process consisting of preparatory school followed by a competition against 5,000 others for a place at prestigious engineering or chemistry schools, such as ENSIC. The dedication, motivation and ambition I witnessed bowled me over. The students had a raw passion for their subject, and understanding the concepts was their ultimate goal.

In my experience in the UK,

sadly there are few who have the same hunger to learn and grow academically. The drive is fuelled by the desire to merely pass the exam and get through; there is a nonchalant approach to complete comprehension. Being asked “but why?” by a lecturer incites waves of panic. For many, the student lifestyle far trumps their course of study.

Returning home to Scotland brought mixed emotions. I was proud of my success, disappointed my adventure had come to an end, relieved to scuttle back to my comfort zone but all the more ready to take on my next challenge. Settling back down into my old routine, I noticed how much I have changed.

Primarily, I chose to do an Erasmus exchange for my CV. However, the personal impact has far outweighed looking impressive on a piece of paper.

TAKE THE PLUNGE

As students, we have a very generous helping of holidays. Once we leave university and commence our professional journey, this time is almost impossible to come by. My advice: use this time wisely. Do something you have always wanted to do. Travel. Meet people. Learn. Gain a deeper sense of who you are and what you truly want out of life. We will all obtain a BEng or an MEng in chemical engineering. We all have the luxury of knowing there will probably be a job out there waiting for us. However, taking the plunge, following what we’re passionate about in a foreign environment and discovering our capabilities will make us happier, more successful and even more employable.

LYNSEY STEEL STUDIES AT HERIOT WATT
UNIVERSITY IN THE UK

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