Experience Report – University of Cambridge

Preparation

I was lucky enough to have spent my direct exchange at the University of Cambridge from October 2025 till June 2026. I started the preparation a year in advance. By the end of January 2025, I had already submitted all the documents that were listed on the FU website. I took the IELTS test to show my English proficiency level, which was quite easy and quick to book. Despite the ease of booking, I would advise not to wait until the last minute. I received my results just two days after the exam, which was very convenient.

After submitting all the necessary documents, alongside the IELTS results, I received an email scheduling an interview. I was mostly asked questions about what I had written in my motivation letter, was warned about how rigorous the studies can be in Cambridge and asked if I was sure I would be able to handle the exchange. As someone who has already moved abroad to study in FU, it wasn't really anything new to me.

After some time, I received another email from the FU exchanges office, congratulating me on the nomination. From then on, communication was mostly handled by the Cambridge international office. I gradually received emails informing me about the next steps as well as an online meeting with other exchange students to help make sense of everything. The Visa application process was made easier and more comprehensible by coordinating with the Cambridge international office. Before submitting a UKVI application, I had to wait for a CAS email from Cambridge, which contained details about my stay there that needed to be put into the visa application.

Cambridge also required a learning agreement signed by the representative of my degree. This is a preliminary plan that shows the courses you'll be taking. The information on who signs the learning agreements can also be found on the FU website in the direct exchange section alongside the courses available for the exchange students. I would advise reading through it carefully. I was only allowed to choose three courses, however, when I arrived in Cambridge and discussed my choices with my director of studies (DoS), she advised adding another course. I wasn't sure if this addition would be recognized, but there was no issue with it at all after coming back.

Cambridge provides accommodation for the exchange students in their colleges. I had to send my CV that also listed my hobbies and interests for a college to choose me. I was chosen by Newnham College, which was right across the lecture block I had classes in. Once a college was assigned to me, the communication was handled solely by the Newnham administrative office.

Colleges also provide funding for various projects students want to take on from conferences to funding for travel. Despite being an exchange student, I was still included in those funding opportunities and managed to get financial support for my participation in an undergraduate linguistics conference in York. So, it really wouldn't hurt to ask as many questions as possible. Especially on a college level, they are always glad to help.

Arrival

The first week of arrival is full of info-meetings explaining the University system to the first-year students. The exchange students are grouped together with the first-years. They let you meet your college tutor and your director of studies (DoS). The college tutor is someone who isn't related to your field of study but is mostly there for emotional support as well as any administrative or financial questions. Your DoS is the one you go to for advice on courses and they are the one who are responsible for any questions about the exchange.

The first week is filled with events organized by the student body, which is a great opportunity to get to know people from the same college. Cambridge has lots of societies, these are groups that share similar interests, some are only college wide, while others university wide. I joined my college choir – voices of Newnham, as well as the Cambridge travel society and the knitting/crocheting society. There's a society fair in the first week which gives you a better overview of which one to join, they also give away loads of free snacks.

Lectures and supervisions

I took 4 courses: Li15 First and Second Language Acquisition, GEC1 Translation to and from German, SPB1 Use of Spanish and SPB2 Translation from Spanish. Cambridge has its own system. Firstly, instead of two semesters they have three 8-week terms throughout the year: Michaelmas, Lent and Easter. I studied the same four courses the entire year, at first glance this does not seem like too much, but there is quite a lot packed into those 8-week terms. There is no classic lecture-seminar system either. For instance, in Li15 we had weekly lectures and biweekly supervisions where we had to submit 1500 word academic essays on a specific topic. Supervisions are one-hour-long meetings with either a PhD student or a professor of the field with two other undergraduate students, where the specific topic of the week is discussed alongside the essay that you had to write. For language courses, the supervisions might vary. For SPB1 I had biweekly supervisions where we completed grammar exercises and had separate speaking supervisions every week, where the workload wasn't as much as for linguistics, since there was no need to write an essay there.

The workload that exchange students have is less compared to a full-time Cambridge student, however it is still quite demanding, but not impossible. My advice would be to look through the course catalogue carefully and choose the kind of combination of subjects which sound doable to you. I only had to write an essay every two weeks alongside other coursework, while some exchange students had one essay every week or two every two weeks, which personally seemed a bit more challenging. There are also literature modules available, which unfortunately I do not have much information about. Mostly every module requires writing an essay for supervisions, except for language courses, including translation.

During my stay there, I was not required to take end of the year exams. Instead, I received my grades based on my coursework.

Community

The setting in Cambridge is very international, brimming with loads of various people from different backgrounds with diverse interests. The fresher's week is quite exciting but tiring at the same

time. There are loads of people, all trying to get acquainted with everyone, which makes it quite overwhelming, but once people start settling down it becomes easier to get to know them, especially since everyone lives at such proximity. People are quite open and happy to chat, however, students are very busy and most of the hangouts end up being in the library, since everybody needs to study.

Colleges also have an option to sign up for a college family, which is designed to connect first- and second-year students. Second year students become college parents of the first-years. I signed up as a college child (first-year) and met my college parents, who are meant to help as fellow students in case you have any questions. I ended up becoming close friends with them. I also found societies quite helpful in finding people with similar interests, I especially enjoyed the travel society, where I got to go to Morocco and even planned a trip to Georgia and Armenia.

Conclusion

This was truly a magical year for me, and it exceeded all my expectations. I was surrounded by motivated and smart people who really inspired me and made me fall in love with my subject even more. Although the city is quite small there is always so much to do and experience: cafes, punting, student production musicals and plays, societies and so much more. Taking part in this exchange truly felt like one of the best decisions of my life.