

**Exchange university**

University College London (UCL)

**Degree programme**

Sustainable Urban Planning and Design

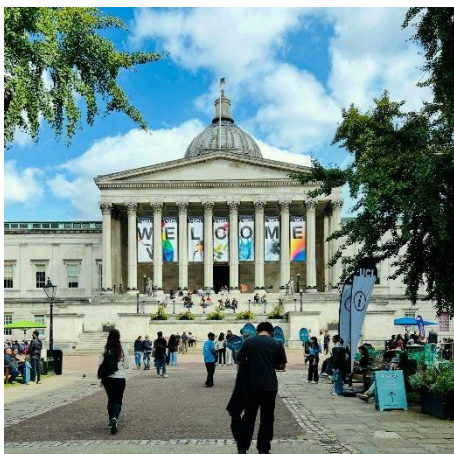
## A vibrant urban experience

### Before departure

I applied to UCL because the Bartlett School of Planning offered so many different courses to choose from with specialisations in urban planning and design. UCL also ranks as one of the top universities in the global context and the Bartlett being topmost in the Built Environment category during my year. I was also fascinated by the idea of how London evolved to being such a multicultural city and wanted to experience how the city functions with such diversity. An exchange semester at UCL was the perfect opportunity for me to study courses that I would like while discovering London.

### Upon arrival

I arrived 10 days before the start of my term. This allowed me to have some days to settle down and then join the welcoming events without stress. UCL arranged so many social events that started one week before the term started, and the events continued for two more weeks afterwards. They were hosted by the student union, different societies, the department and different master's programme. Most of the events that I attended were arranged by either by the university, student unions, or the Bartlett School of Planning society (BUPS). Since being an exchange student, I did not belong to a specific master's program in UCL, I attended the welcoming events hosted by the program department that one of my chosen modules belonged to, Urban design and City Planning. This was a great opportunity to meet fellow course mates and learn about the previous works in the same course. I also got to make good friends in that event and met my future groupmates for the Place making course.



*Upon arrival at UCL*



*Boat trip around London arranged by BUPS.*

## **Financials**

I received the Erasmus grant which covered part of my living cost. For accommodation cost I had to rely on CSN student loan which I upped to the maximum amount possible. I also had to use my personal savings to cover the rest of the financials. Accommodation in London was the highest cost in my whole journey. Transportation cost is also quite high. However, the living cost for example groceries, clothing and basic needs are pretty similar to Sweden.

## **Accommodation**

I got my accommodation in one of the UCL halls, Goldsmid House. It was a 20min tube ride plus walking from the university and the location was in zone 1. I shared the common kitchen with five other students, they were all friendly and helpful. The housing condition was quite good. There were always some weekly social activities arranged by the hall team.

## **University and studies**

UCL is a large university with many faculties and departments within. The Bartlett School of planning itself has many programs that are managed separately. The main difference from KTH would be that the programs at KTH are structured under the umbrella term 'Planning and Design' while the programs in the Bartlett are structured with specific focus. I usually had one lecture per day and the rest of the time I mostly spent in the Bartlett library, the urban design studio or in the student centre depending on where my lecture was nearest to at the day. All the courses were offered in English. I was assigned a personal tutor who helped me getting around with my course selection and other administrative issues. The Bartlett also offered some self-paced courses like graphic skills support, academic communication that are helpful to familiarise with their structure.

## **Courses**

I took four modules, all within the Bartlett School of Planning. I was interested in taking at least one design-based course, so I took the module Urban design: Place making (BPLN0042). This module was combined with weekly lectures and tutorials. The assignments were project based involving groupwork. This was one of my favourite courses as I got to learn about the core principles of urban design that we sometimes tend to overlook.

My other interest was in Housing so the additional modules that I took were related to this topic. One of them was Sustainable Residential Design and Retrofit (BPLN0109). This course covered the sustainable design practice both for new construction and older residential buildings. The course was lecture based combined with some class activity like group discussion and familiarising with data calculations.

Another module that I took was Planning for Housing: Process (BPLN0044). This module was heavily focused on the UK housing practice and mostly theoretical. It demanded a lot of reading since I was not familiar with the UK planning. But for me it was interesting to learn about a different planning system.

The last module was Management of Housing Development Projects (BPLN0018). This was structured with lectures, site visits and group discussions. We had four site visits in different large scale housing projects across London and got to talk with people involved in the project management. This was helpful in understanding the theories and relating them with on-site practice.



*Site visit at Walter Segal, a community-led self-build housing in Lewisham, London.*



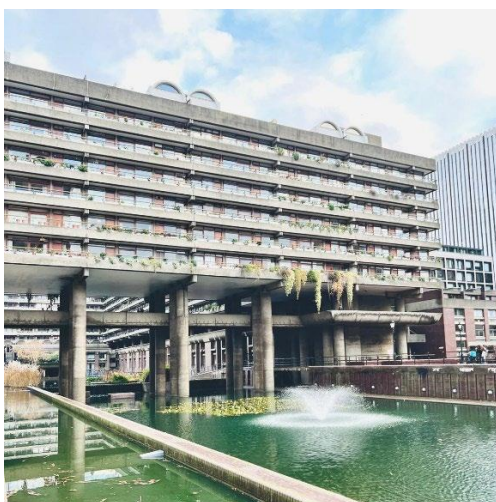
*Site visit at Kidbrook village, an urban regeneration project focusing on social and ecological sustainability.*

### **City and country**

London is an amazing city to be in. The city is densely expanded and easy to travel around (if you live in the centre). I felt meeting with new people here is much easier and people are more welcoming. It is multicultural but still withholds many traditional elements and history that makes it more interesting.

### **Leisure and social activities**

I spent most of my spare time exploring the bits of London. Looking around the architecture, going to different museums, exploring neighbourhoods. I also loved going to a few musicals. I joined the Bartlett School of Planning Society (BUPS) and participated in some of their social activities like walking tours and pub-quizzes. I also managed to go on some day trips by train outside of London.



*A walk in the Barbican centre.*



*Thanksgiving dinner with my groupmates.*

### **Sustainability**

Unfortunately, I had to take the flight to London as there was no direct train from Stockholm. I mostly used public transport. According to TfL (Transportation for London), the buses in London are 100% low or zero-emission vehicles. I took the tube on my way to campus to save time and opted for bus ride on my way back. UCL arranged events to raise awareness on sustainability. There were also occasional pop-up markets in the campus to buy/sell second-hand items to promote reuse. However, the recycling rules in general is not very strict in London. There was no sorted recycling in my hall that separates papers, plastic, metal and glass, all the recyclable items went to the same bin.

### **Other recommendations and observations**

The Bartlett often organizes public lectures and exhibitions followed by social mingles. These are good opportunities to learn more about the ongoing research and networking with people who are working in the same field.

The BSP also organises career fairs where different organizations come and give presentation followed up by a Q&A session. If you want to check out career options in London after graduation, do attend these events.

The UCL halls have good number of seats so the chance of getting accommodation is quite good. But the accommodation portal opens earlier than the admission, so the queue is long. If you want to stay in the hall apply as soon as possible after getting offer letter.

Bartlett offers both 1 or 2 terms for exchange period. I could only do exchange for one term due to personal reasons, but if you can I would recommend going for both terms and get the full experience!