



**ERASMUS+ MOBILITY PROGRAMME
MY INTERNSHIP WITH GERMAN LAW FIRM
NZZ NAGY LEGAL**

Julia Glukhikh

Introduction

Last summer I undertook an internship programme with a law firm in Germany under Erasmus+ Mobility Scheme. This was a truly valuable and useful experience as I got a chance to observe how a different legal system operated practice and compare it with the English legal system. I gained a fair amount of practical knowledge of German law, obtained professional networking connections in several European countries and raised my personal self-esteem by accepting the challenge.

I quickly found out that the second year of the LLB law degree was significantly more demanding than the first year with revision and coursework preparation taking most of my free time. While heavily involved with the academic work, volunteering and Plymouth University Law Society competitions, I completely forgot about the deadlines for vacation scheme applications with law firms in the UK. On missing these deadlines, I started looking for other options such as paralegal roles, business internships and volunteering projects. The application process was daunting and I started to lose focus and with it any likely hope of success.

As a student ambassador, I work part-time at Plymouth University's International Office. My supervising manager, Alana Hunter, who is a senior administrator, suggested that I investigate the Erasmus+ programmes. Erasmus+ is an international student exchange scheme that enables participants to study or undertake professional training for a period of between 2 and 12 months in another European country. There is funding available for students to support them during their work or study abroad. The grant rates for students from UK universities are set by the British Council and the amount available depends on the cost of living in the destination country.

At first, I was reluctant to look at the offers available as I associated the Erasmus+ scheme with international university exchange for the purpose of study, not work-based experience. My other concern was that law is a very jurisdictional specific subject that may not be easily transferrable given many of the crucial differences between the legal systems of the UK, which are traditionally adversarial based, and the majority of European countries which are more inquisitorial. This is why I thought it unlikely that there would be any suitable options available to do comparative legal work. Also going abroad for work normally implies that speaking a foreign language will be required. I had some knowledge of conversational French obtained at high school and 'covered with dust' since then, which was not sufficient for professional use. Finally, I was worried about my eligibility as I was an international, non-EU student which usually means that most funding opportunities are not available to me.

Securing an International Work Placement

Alana suggested that I contact [Plymouth Global](#), a department at the University that develops international partnership networks for current students and staff. They were very approachable and friendly and explained that non-EU students studying at UK universities could take part in the Erasmus+ exchange programme and receive funding on the same conditions as home students. The University provides support with completing the documents and authorising grant payments but first I had to find a suitable internship: one that was law related internship and in English. I started my search by registering an account on the [Erasmus Intern](#) website. The personal profile looks like a short CV where you can include your academic and professional experience as well as your interests and aspirations. Once the necessary sections are complete, your profile becomes visible to the companies hiring based on the preferences that you have set – country and/or industry. You may wait for the offers or invitations to apply to come from the companies or alternatively you can be proactive and do the search yourself and apply directly for the available positions. Due to the specific requirements that I had, there was a limited choice of options, however, I managed to apply to three firms in Germany, Spain and Belgium. Shortly after that I received an invitation for an interview on Skype with the German law firm [NZZ Nagy Legal](#) based in Nuremberg. This is an international law firm which specialises in Corporate Law, IP Law and arbitration. I was interviewed by two lawyers, one of whom was a qualified UK barrister working in Nuremberg. I raised my concerns about not speaking any German but I was told that I would be given case work in English and possibly... in Russian. In fact, the members of the team work in several languages, including German, English, Hungarian, Russian and Persian. Shortly after the interview, I was delighted to receive an invitation to go to Nuremberg for a summer internship.

It took some time to sort out my visa and grant arrangements but Plymouth Global guided me through so the process was not too stressful.

I spent two months in Nuremberg, the city is the second largest in the German state of Bavaria (after Munich). Historically, it was referred to as the 'Treasure Chest' because it was the unofficial capital and one of the richest and most significant cities of the Holy Roman Empire. It is renowned for being the seat of the world's first international criminal tribunal (International Military Tribunal).

One of the most memorable experiences for me was visiting the Museum of the Nuremberg Trials. Seeing the courtroom where the first international criminal process took place was breath-taking and poignant. Interestingly, this famous courtroom is still used for criminal trials.



My lack of German was an issue in everyday communication but as long as I showed that I was extremely apologetic for not knowing the language and was keen to learn and speak at least some words in German the locals treated me kindly and did their best to help me out in English. The team at the firm gave me a warm welcome upon my arrival and treated me to lunch in town on my first day. My Erasmus+ Mobility agreement involved creating a programme of professional development during my internship. The programme contained the list of objectives that I was expecting to achieve through my work at the law firm. I listed several specialist and transferrable skills such as case briefing, client work, letter writing, negotiations that I wanted to develop. My overall performance was to be assessed by my supervisor at the end of the internship. I worked full-time at the office from Monday to Friday and travelled to see other places at the weekends. Since Nuremberg has convenient transport links, travelling to Munich, Vienna and Prague was tempting and easy. Visiting these places gave me wider opportunities to learn more about the different cities and cultures and helped further my own independence. Additionally, my long-standing dream has come true – I visited the Galerie Belvedere to see one of my favourite paintings by Gustav Klimt, *The Kiss*.

Attending the Hungarian Supreme Court

I was invited to observe Peter Taller, an attorney at the firm representing the Board of Members of a German cooperative company, in a case brought against the Hungarian shareholders of the company heard in the Supreme Court of Hungary in Budapest. All of the proceedings were carried out in Hungarian, nevertheless it was a fascinating experience shadowing a barrister in the highest court of another country. The court building in the Ancient Greek style astonishes with its perfect proportions and you get the message of 'supremacy' just by looking at it. Once inside, the first thing that steals our attention is the statue of Justitia. Carved from a marble block, this three metre high statue of the Greek goddess represents jurisdiction and justice and reminded me of our own Lady Justitia at the Old Bailey in London. High ceilings, wide wooden doors, and almost complete silence – all together made an impression of supremacy over any person walking down the corridors of the palace.

The Supreme Court of Hungary, also known as the *Curia*, has three departments that deal with different subject area of legal matters: criminal, civil and administrative-labour law. According to the Hungarian Constitution, also known as the Fundamental Law, the decisions adopted by the Curia are binding on the lower courts of the state. According to the Act CLXI of 2011 on the Organisation and Administration of the Courts, the Curia as well as the five regional Courts of Appeal and the administrative and labour courts are required to publish their decision on the merits of the case in digital form in the collection of Hungarian court decisions. In Hungary, around 68% of judges are women. The judging panel in the case that I observed was also mixed.

I was also asked to conduct research on the Corporate Law of the UAE and prepare a brief leaflet on how to set up a business in this country. It was interesting to see how the country with a relatively young legal tradition (the UAE were founded in 1971) has evolved into a business hub for world leading business. The UAE's legal system is founded upon British law and civil law principles with influences from Islamic Shari'a, French, Roman and Egyptian laws. Such a mix of influences is probably what makes the legal system so unique and so responsive to the needs of the modern state. In terms of Corporate Law, the most interesting to research was the subject of free economic zones in Dubai which are ruled by different laws and regulations than non-free zones areas. The free zones offer highly attractive conditions for international business as they allow 100% foreign ownership of companies in contrast to 49% foreign ownership for the companies set up outside the free zones. The free economic zones also provide tax concessions and unrestricted repatriation of capital and profits. Companies

receive a guarantee not to be subject to tax in the UAE for a specific number of years, which in some cases can be as long as 100 years.

I was also engaged on a road accident case that occurred in Scotland and at least here language was less of an issue! The firm was advising the family of the deceased victim who was a Hungarian national. I prepared a case brief and did some research on victim support in Scottish criminal cases. The case was due to be heard in Glasgow later this year. My last task involved researching the precedents set by the European Court of Human Rights on the scale of damages available to the party against whom the violation of the Convention had been found by the Court. I was working on this case with my fellow colleague, an exchange intern from Hungary, who continued working on it when my internship finished.

Upon completing my internship, my performance was marked as 'outstanding' by the law firm and I am extremely proud of that achievement (Editor: many congratulations!). Personally, I think that the internship has helped to shape my vision of my future career. It gave me the confidence to know that if I ever wish to undertake any legal related work outside of the UK, I will be able to do that successfully and that I should not be afraid of being open to different options out there. It was during my Erasmus internship when I decided that I would try to get on the BPTC after I finish my degree. It gave me the confidence and motivation to secure different work experiences such as marshalling His Honour Judge Darlow and His Honour Judge Lawrie in Plymouth Crown Court and also undertaking marshalling with a couple of local barristers' chambers in my first semester of the final year.

Going abroad, even for a short period of time, allowed me to rediscover myself. It is not just about the challenge of going outside my comfort zone, it is also about understanding different habits, meeting new people, and the new society that you are inevitably becoming a part of. And I do not think that my Erasmus programme would have been that successful unless I was prepared to allow the environment to change me, to educate me differently so I would be able to rediscover myself and move forward. In many ways, such experience opens doors into completely new worlds and different opportunities. Regardless of what you will do once you have completed your internship, you will get a better understanding of yourself and see how strong you really are with the confidence to accept and overcome the challenges and become a winner in your own life.