

Student Exchange Report

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Massey Degree: Bachelor of Agricultural Science

Host University: Royal Agricultural University

Semester and year of exchange: Full year exchange, Oct 2014-June 2015

[Jordyn's One Farm blog](#)

Initially, when I first decided I wanted to do an exchange, I knew that I wanted to go to either the USA or the UK. However I was always leaning slightly more towards the UK as Britain was a place I'd wanted to visit for a long time. When I found the Royal Agricultural University (RAU) through the Massey Exchange website, I discovered that they had a program that was almost identical to the BAgriSci. The more research I did on the university, the more I knew that this was the one for me – it had similarities to Massey, as it was just outside of town, with a beautiful campus and it's own teaching farms, with many highly regarded lecturers.



However there were also a number of differences (aside from the obvious fact that it was on the other side of the world). The university is steeped in history: it was the first agricultural college in the English speaking world, opening its doors to students in 1845, although I have been told that the "Main Building" was an old farm house, built in the 1600s. Further to that, the Prince of Wales has been the president of the RAU since 1982. However what really drew me to this university was its small size of around just 1300 students – I was so intrigued to find out what it would be like attending a much smaller university.

The RAU not only met my expectations, it well and truly exceeded them. While I had been told by previous exchange students that I would have the time of my life, I tried not to get my hopes up too much. But as it turned out, I needn't have worried – my time in England has been one of the best years of my life, and it was the perfect way to finish my university career (I completed the final year of my degree at the RAU).

I studied six papers (or modules, as they are called here), over the entire academic year here. At the RAU, they have three terms rather than two semesters, so papers are generally studied over all three terms, meaning that (for me at least) there is less time spent in class during the week, compared with my papers at Massey, which had to fit in to one semester. I was fortunate in that I didn't have to do an honours project like the rest of my third year classmates, so while I only took six modules, students are often required to take seven or eight. The modules I took were as follows:

- Emerging Agricultural Issues
- Advanced Livestock Production
- Agricultural and Equine Journalism
- Advanced Crop and Plant Science
- Integrated Farm Project
- New Developments in Agricultural Science

I would not hesitate to recommend any of these papers – I genuinely really enjoyed every single one of them, and I felt like I learned a tremendous amount from all six classes. Many of these papers had a large number of guest lecturers, either from within the university, or agricultural professionals from around the country, and even overseas. In fact, occasionally the RAU has lecturers from Massey presenting!

For the most part, the teaching methods and environments were relatively similar to Massey. All lecturers used powerpoint presentations to assist with their teaching, and attempted to involve the students as much as possible through questions and discussions. One major difference, however, was the reduction in weekly contact time. As I have already mentioned, modules span the entire academic year, so naturally there is a lot more time to cover content compared to one semester at Massey. However while this meant I often only had a class for each module once a week, these classes could go for up to three hours at a time. Some of my papers also had farm visits and practical trips regularly to further expand our skills and knowledge.



I stayed on-campus, in the halls of residence, as I felt that moving to the other side of the world and almost entering the unknown, it would be the easiest option, and likely the most cost-effective. Here at the RAU, the halls of residence are quite different to Massey. There are a range of different halls, with only the newest building having a kitchen and common room. For the others, you just have your room, and either en-suite or shared bathrooms, depending on your choice. As a result, anyone who wasn't in the self-catered hall had the choice of either a breakfast/dinner or fully catered meal plan. Also, where at Massey there is one main door and you have access to the entire hall, at the RAU you only have access to your corridor or house, depending on which hall you are in (when you choose your halls, you choose your meal plan and room type, rather than the actual hall you want to live in). It was quite different having no common room to spend your free time in, however there is the large campus bar, the 'Tithe', and a lack of common area in the halls definitely didn't impede our chances of making friends. Furthermore, it seemed that more friendships were made throughout the campus, rather than just in your hall, as no common area forced you to get out and find other ways of interacting with other students.

The halls of residence at the RAU are slightly more expensive than what I paid at Massey back in 2011, however I chose the fully catered meal plan, rather than just receiving dinner like I did at Massey. Both universities provided cleaners as part of the accommodation cost, however at the RAU your cleaner also vacuumed and dusted your bedroom on a regular basis, cleaned your en-suite or basin (depending on your room type – every room at least had their own basin, mirror and storage for toiletries etc.), and emptied your rubbish bin, as well as delivering fresh linen and taking the dirty linen away fortnightly. So essentially, you were getting what you paid for. Outside of accommodation, general living expenses seem to

be relatively similar to NZ, although after a while I stopped converting everything I looked at back to \$NZ!

The main extra-curricular activity I participated in at the RAU was the International Society – of which I was the President. The society organised events and excursions for both international and British students, as a way to see more outside of the university and the town, as well as provide an opportunity for all students to mix together and learn and appreciate each other's cultures. For example, initially we organised a night for dinner and drinks at a local restaurant for people to get to know each other, which was attended by both internationals and Brits, and we had a trip to the Bath Christmas Markets, which was a wonderful evening, especially for those of us who usually have their Christmas in summer – it was a very different experience wandering around listening to Christmas carols wearing a big coat, beanie, scarf and gloves, while sipping on mulled wine! I also helped the RAU international team to improve their section of the university's website by gathering profiles on other international students. Not only was this useful to the university, but it was great to learn more about a range of people from such different backgrounds. Aside from that, while I chose not to play netball this year, I made sure to make an effort to watch the university sports teams when I could – every Wednesday afternoon was free of classes to allow time for sports, and most weeks there was a home game for at least one of our teams. This timetabling meant that there was always plenty of support on the sidelines (especially for the rugby teams), which created a great atmosphere.

I've learned so many things about the UK and British culture while I've been here, and so many of them are just second nature to me here. Two that stand out, however, is that gumboots (or wellies as they are called here), are a totally acceptable form of footwear for most occasions (with the exception of black tie events!), and you really can't have a roast meal without a yorkshire pudding, it's just not the same!



While it seems like such a cliché thing to say, it really is difficult to choose just a few highlights from my time here. Having a tour of London in my first week at the RAU (through an international pre-session course) would definitely be one, it was just amazing to finally be wandering around this city I'd dreamed of visiting for so long. Another highlight would have to be not only attending Champions Day at the Royal Ascot Races, but also seeing the Queen there – I'd barely been in the country two months! The Christmas Ball at the RAU is another, it's so much fun getting dressed up, and here so much effort is put in – 99% of the guys wear bowties – they really go all out (often in NZ it is hard enough to get guys to wear a tie, let alone a suit jacket!). I was also lucky enough to spend my first Christmas away from home with a good friend from NZ, who I actually met at Massey. We had a week in Barcelona and Amsterdam! RAG week was another highlight – RAG stands for 'Raising and Giving' and it is a week organised by the Student Union with a range of activities and events all put on to raise money for selected charities. The largest event was the RAG rally, where a

large number of the student body get dressed up, decorate their cars with stickers, and head to a destination somewhere in England in convoy, for a night out (the destination is only revealed the night before). This year it was Cambridge, and we all had exclusive access to one floor of Lolalo's nightclub. I'm going on a bit here, so I'll just skip to my last highlight, and probably the biggest one of all: the May Ball Weekend. This is held the weekend after exams finish, and it is a fantastic celebration to end the academic year. It began with a day out at the polo, before the May Ball on the Friday night, which goes from 8pm until 7am the next day, at which point they hold a survivors photo. The next day is time to recover before a night at the local nightclub, followed by a very relaxed Sunday with a mini music festival on campus. Everyone was in such good spirits the entire weekend, and it was such a great way to round off my time at the RAU.

I have to say the thing I found most challenging about the whole experience was deciding what I would pack to take with me and what would have to stay at home! My whole experience at the RAU has gone very smoothly, aided by the helpfulness of the entire staff from both Massey University and the RAU. I won't pretend I didn't get homesick at times – it was particularly hard at Christmas time – but I only had to remind myself of what a wonderful opportunity I was having, and it didn't take me long to get over it. Plus, with the amount of technology around it was so easy to keep in contact with friends and family back at home.

I think what I have learned and gained the most from my exchange is to appreciate who people are and where they come from. Everyone has a different background, and sometimes we can't always relate to it, but I've found that it is important to understand the necessity to accept people for who they are. It is the differences between people and their cultures that make life more interesting, and I've had so much fun learning about other people, and what makes them who they are.



The biggest tip that I would be sure to immerse yourself in both the university and English life – to truly make the most of the experience you have to get stuck in, be in the middle of things and make the most of every opportunity. Sign up to a club or society, attend sports matches and other activities, and go out of your way to meet new people. The great thing about being a foreign student is that your accent is a great conversation starter, and you'll be surprised at the amount of people who have either been to NZ, know someone who's there, or just want to visit our country. But while your accent can come in useful, be prepared for others to mock you for it (lightheartedly of course!).

Both Massey University and the RAU have been unbelievably supportive and helpful through the entire process, from the moment I first enquired about an exchange, through the application process and during my time here. At no point have I been left stranded or felt helpless about anything – there was always someone I could ask for help or advice, who were only too happy to assist me in whatever way they could.

Doing this student exchange has been the best decision I have made in my entire life. I have had so many wonderful, new and exciting experiences, and I have seen more places during my time at university than I could have imagined. I've also made the most incredible bunch of friends during my time in the UK, and met some truly extraordinary people. The opportunities provide by an exchange are immense, such as getting a guided tour of The Telegraph newspaper and the BBC headquarters in London, among many, many others. This experience has helped me to grow and change (for the better) as a person, and I feel truly lucky to have been in a position to have had this opportunity. I would not hesitate to recommend an exchange to anyone – I wish I could do it all over again!

