



EUCN European Parliament

Internship Report

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Introductory Remarks

In 2012, I was one of two New Zealanders that had the privilege to undertake an internship at the European Parliament in Brussels, Belgium. These internships are setup annually by the European Union Centres Network (EUCN) in New Zealand in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) and offer students the opportunity to work for the biggest international organisation in the world – the European Union (EU). Following an application process, including interviews, the selected candidates are offered a placement alongside a Member of the European Parliament (MEP) for three months. The experience is invaluable. On a personal level, I was able to expand my practical experience working alongside political representatives, as well as develop my understanding of the EU as a functioning international body. My own studies benefited significantly during this learning procedure. On a diplomatic level, I was able to see, over the course of the three months, how the EU works with New Zealand in a number of areas. It is my personal belief that the continued engagement of New Zealanders within the EU will aid NZ-EU relations. This brief report offers further insight into the MEP internship process where I will share more of my experiences. It will hopefully be of some help to future participants, as well as encourage the continuation of the internships.

Preparation

As I was completing my Master of Arts in European Union studies at the time of undertaking the internship, I chose to extend my three month trip in Europe to six months in order to be able to complete additional research. I was therefore preparing to spend half a year away overseas. First

and foremost, I think it is important to have the internship details, as well as details of any additional travel, in place. I was lucky enough to receive the details of my MEP, Hannu Takkula from Finland, a few months in advance. I made contact with both his Assistant (who I was mostly going to be working with) as well as a contact at the New Zealand Embassy in Brussels responsible for relations with the European Parliament (currently Melanee Beatson). It is important to have a one page C.V prepared in advance, which outlines your key skills and attributions relevant to the position. I sent my C.V along with scanned copies of my passport photo to the office where I was going to be working. Once I had the dates of my internship and details of where I would be working in place, I was able to organise the rest of my travel. I arranged an exchange with a university in Madrid, Spain, in the small township of Getafe where I was going to be completing case study work. If you are interested in studying while away overseas, I advise researching what universities are partner universities of your home place of study and arranging a short-term postgraduate exchange. This way you do not have to be enrolled in specific courses (or pay fees), but can still utilise the accommodation tools and international student programmes of the host university. Once my study details were in place, I was able to book my tickets with the University of Canterbury, arriving into Spain and departing from Brussels. The in-between flights were my own responsibility.

Once your flights are sorted, you can breathe a sigh of relief that the main details have been arranged! I still advise, however, sorting your travel and work insurance, visas (if necessary) and monetary situation in advance. Southern Cross Travel Insurance has a wonderful Working Overseas travel insurance policy. Get an immediate online quote at the website below:

<https://www.scti.co.nz/wo/publicmain.aspx>

You will need to take a copy of your policy with you on the first day of your internship, so print all documentation.

I was lucky enough to be travelling on a British Passport. For those participants that need a visa, I recommend applying for this up to six months in advance. See the *Tips for Interns* document on the types of visas available and how to apply.

Money is also very important to work out. The cheapest accommodation in Brussels that I found was 500EUR a month (including power, internet bills) and I spent around another 1000EUR a month in living costs (more if I was travelling in the weekends). I took my own savings as well as the internship grant and had a great time! I also took little cash, but what I did take I hid in various parts of my

luggage (and tried not to forget where!). I was mostly spending Euros, but I also took Pounds and US dollars. I pre-arranged travel cards and a Visa card to use overseas and I found this to be the best way to travel (rather than wads of cash!!).

Accommodation

I was advised to spend the first week in Brussels in a hostel and look for the right apartment during that time. This works for a number of participants, but being the over-organised student that I am I was worried about missing out on accommodation, as September is the time when most interns start with the EU (following the European summer break). It is possible to secure accommodation through reliable organisations from NZ. I rented a room with other interns (5-8 per apartment), using a company called IGEP Brussels. They will find you a good room. They rent rooms or small apartments to interns with the EU that are very close to the Parliament, Council and Commission. You will pay a monthly cost that includes your rent, power and wireless internet. Warmth, security, location and good roommates are all important when looking for accommodation in Brussels and IGEP can offer you that. Contact Roy at roy@igep.eu

See their website and Facebook pages below:

http://www.rooms-igep.eu/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3&Itemid=4

<http://www.facebook.com/igeplocations>

If you do want to sign up to a place before you leave NZ using another company, be very careful to check the person before you hand over bond (*'la garantie'*). You can check a site such as <http://www.scamdex.com/> for their name or email account.

My best memories and friends were created by renting with other interns. I was able to rent with



people who came from all over Europe, including Spain, Romania, Bulgaria, Germany, Austria, Italy and Cyprus. It was a great way to practice other languages, with Spanish being my second language!! As the only Non-European, I felt it essential to leave my mark by pinning an empty pineapple lumps packet to the map of Europe in

our shared-kitchen area. This went down a treat with the other flatmates, who got to experience those delicious lumps for themselves.

Brussels

Brussels is not quite what I expected. Having travelled much of Europe and experiencing the delights of other capital cities such as London, Paris and Madrid, Brussels felt a bit dull and grey in comparison. It is what you make of it, however. I thoroughly enjoyed my job and loved spending my free time with my flatmates, so for me it felt like a home. It does rain a lot though and when everybody clears out in the weekends to go home, it can feel pretty boring. I advise travelling to the forests in the outer part of the city in the weekends, or even to other parts of Belgium. The train system is so easy, with all the main trains departing from Central, Noord or Midi train stations. A round trip to Ghent, for example, will cost around 13EUR and it is one of the loveliest cities I have visited. You only need a few hours to see Ghent, but many hours to enjoy the lovely cafes and restaurants along the canal banks.



Furthermore, Brussels is in the heart of Europe when it comes to international travel. A 1-2 hour plane ride will take you to Scotland, Denmark and England for instance. I would catch the train to the airport after work on a Friday and hop on a plane to visit friends in either of these countries for the



weekend. I even got to experience an All Blacks match in Edinburgh! If you can hitch a ride with a friend who has a car, jump over the border to Luxembourg. Luxembourg is a hidden treasure as it is so small nobody bothers to visit! It holds six of Europe's most famous castles however, and while you're visiting you may as well jump one more border and experience dinner in Trier – the oldest town in Germany.

Make sure you are enjoying Brussels in the weekends when December rolls around however. The most amazing Christmas markets open up in the city centre, where you can enjoy hot waffles, Belgian chocolate, Belgian fries and mulled wine until your heart's content.

Internship

I loved my role within the European Parliament. It was remarkable how much responsibility we as interns were given. I was able to attend committee meetings, Party meetings, conferences, lunches and breakfast seminars and even organise the content for some of those events. The Parliament itself is like an adventure playground that takes almost a whole month to become familiar with. I spent a lot of time delivering and collecting items on behalf of the office so that I could understand how each tower works. The bulk of my work, however, was split between secretarial-type work and advisory-type work. As my office became more confident in my skills, I was able to begin work on Declarations, Working Opinions, Draft Reports, journal articles and speeches, whether writing them or amending them. Overtime, I began to realise how busy the office of an MEP is and wanted to take responsibility for my own work without having to rely on my supervisor. In my last month, when I had come to know the systems, I was able to involve myself in tasks relevant to the work of my MEP (culture and education). I was only ever short of work if I wanted to be.



As a result of hard work, I was able to join my office on the November week to Strasbourg. This took my experience of the European Parliament to a whole new level! The pressures of the Strasbourg week and excitement of working in the same building as some of the world's most powerful politicians made time fly. Strasbourg is where the whole Parliament meets for debate and although interns cannot sit in on those debates, you are part of the backstage team working to make them a success. I was very lucky that during my three months at Parliament I was able to work alongside MEP Hannu Takkula and his assistant Vesa Kangaslahti. They were very different to work for, but both were hardworking as well as great fun when the time called.

Conclusion

The internship itself is the best political experience of my career to-date. I highly advise that, while the funding allows it, the EUCN and MFAT continue to run the internship program, as the benefits it provides to students cannot be gained anywhere in New Zealand. The best advice I have for future interns is to make yourself available to every experience possible, whether work-related or socially-related. It is a good idea to have your study on hold, as the pressures of full-time work and study can impede upon the experience you will have at the Parliament. The internship will be what you make of it! I wish all those fortunate enough to receive an internship offer the very best with their three month experience and remain available if you have any further questions.

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