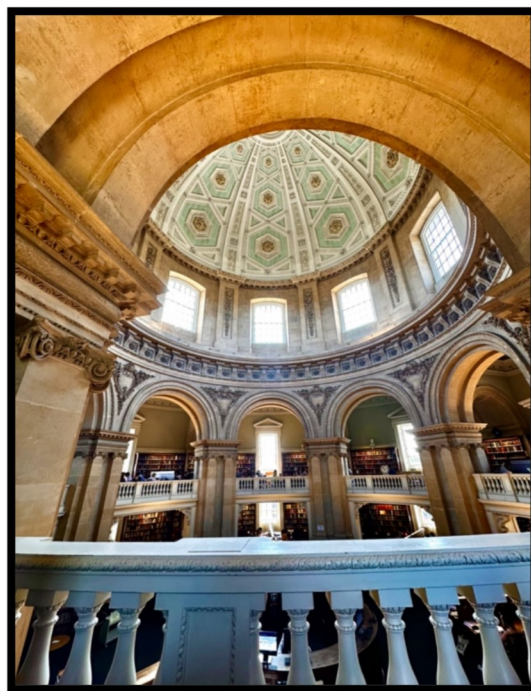


Experience Report

WRITING A DIPLOMA THESIS @ UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

NUFFIELD DEPARTMENT OF MEDICINE,
PANDEMIC SCIENCES INSTITUTE

Major:	Pharmacy (state examination)
Number of semesters:	8 (Post-Graduate, Licensed pharmacist)
Host country:	United Kingdom
Host university:	University of Oxford
Start and end date:	16.01. - 15.07.2023
Reason:	Visiting student as part of my diploma thesis



1. Preparing my stay abroad

Already during my studies, I wanted to spend some time abroad. Although the pharmacy degree programme at the University of Freiburg offers the opportunity to spend a semester abroad through partner universities, this was unfortunately never an option for me, as the time spent there cannot be credited. Since I had already planned both semesters during my practical year of pharmacy studies after the 2nd state examination, it was obvious to me that I wanted to plan a stay abroad after my 3rd state examination and licensure as a pharmacist and combine it with completing a diploma thesis. I wanted to go to an English-speaking country, and I started applying to various universities in the US and UK about half a year before I wanted to start.

Here's my first tip: Don't be afraid to apply on your own initiative! The professors love it! At least that's been my experience. After about a month, I was able to choose between 2 Ivy League universities and the University of Oxford, and I am still in contact with the people at the universities I turned down to plan further stays abroad for the time of my PhD.

So: You don't always need connections or anything else. A good letter of motivation and showing people that you live for what you do is enough! The decision to go to the University of Oxford was mainly due to the special nature of the research group and the perfect match with my research interests, which I will come to later. Once everything was settled with the research group in Oxford, I submitted the application for the thesis and the DAAD-PROMOS scholarship, which worked out excellently and easily in both cases. The International Office at the University of Freiburg is very helpful and responds quickly to any queries.

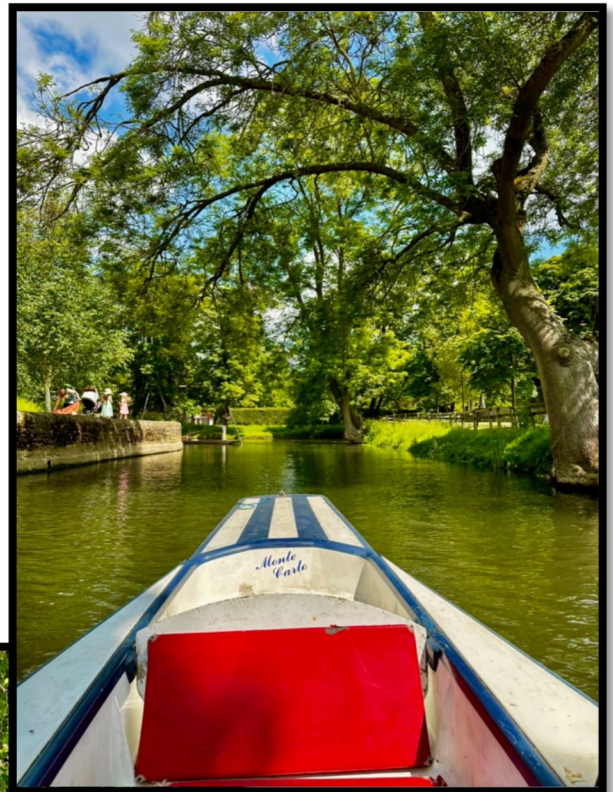
Off I went to Oxford in January 2023.

2. Living in Oxford

As a European, you can continue to live in the UK for up to half a year after Brexit as an enrolled student in Germany without applying for a VISA. The International Office of the University of Oxford accompanies you every step of the way and has a contact person at the Foreigners' Registration Office so that you can get answers to any questions very quickly. This is another area where the University of Oxford's experience with international students is very noticeable. The organisation of the immigration was therefore smooth. I was able to take out a combination insurance contract (health insurance, etc.) through DAAD, which was also very simple and straightforward.

Let's talk about living in Oxford: it's expensive! Both the cost of living but especially the housing in Oxford can be very expensive with prices ranging from 100 to 600 pounds a WEEK (and more). I lived in Alice House (St. Clements), which was expensive but without any problems, as it has everything you need. If you have enough time, you can also find cheaper accommodation and there are plenty of student halls of residence. However, I have often heard of private landlords ripping you off, so beware of temptingly cheap offers.

Oxford is beautiful! Especially now in summer, when I'm writing this report, Oxford shows its picturesque side with its colleges, the river and the meadows and is worth a visit even if you don't study here. Oxford itself is perfectly located, about 1.5 hours from London and Heathrow Airport (there is a 24/7 shuttle every 30 minutes to both the airport and the city). No matter in which direction you want to go on a trip, the connections from Oxford are very good and the bus connections are not at all comparable to German conditions. Here, buses go everywhere and usually every 5-10 minutes 24/7. Especially because almost all shops are open on Sundays, the city with its many students, tourists and shopping opportunities seems much bigger than it is.



The weather: It is much sunnier and warmer than you think! I haven't experienced a day with only rain and, especially in summer, sunshine, and high temperatures for days without a break. The best way to get useful information about where to go and what to do is to ask locals from your study group and go out and explore with them. You will also find many German students in Oxford (German Oxford Society). Of course, the Turf Tavern, The Alchemist (for all natural scientists) and, as an activity before or after, "punting" and a nice formal dinner with one of your colleagues from the colleges (men: take your suit and a black shirt with you, you will need it!) are recommended. As a visiting student, you can also get into all the colleges for free at any time, but you cannot attend the dinners without an invitation from a member. What's special about Oxford is that there is something special to do every day and every week. Whether it's the big boat race, a speech by Bill Gates or fireworks in one of the colleges ... every day there's something new that you can only experience here. Take advantage of it!

3. Impression of the University of Oxford and the Pandemic Sciences Institute

The University of Oxford lives up to its promise. The research possibilities (I can only speak for the medical faculty) are unbelievable and in principle no limits are set. However, this may also be due to the special research group that developed the well-known ChAdOx1 and ChAdOx2 vector platform, which was used in the AstraZeneca vaccine. Here I did research on new delivery technologies, which is exactly my research interest. The research group is a diverse mix of Master's students, PhD students, post-docs, but also employed scientists with decades of experience. This gives you optimal research opportunities because no matter what scientific question you have, there is always an expert. My working group was incredibly kind and helpful, especially my supervisor, who was very concerned about my well-being and provided a lot of help with proofreading etc. when I was writing my thesis. You just notice in this group how much everyone loves what they do and how the Corona pandemic, in which the group managed to develop a vaccine in a very short time, motivated people incredibly to be one step ahead of the next pandemic. The Pandemic Sciences Institute is part of the Nuffield Department of Medicine and was founded based on the scientific successes of the working group and will have its own building on the well-known Old Road Campus (Jenner Institute) in the next few years. The possibility of a PhD in Oxford in this working group has also arisen. For me, however, there were very personal reasons that brought me back home. The research opportunities and the social fabric here are unbeatable.

4. Content and purpose of my stay abroad

As already mentioned, the reason for my stay was to write my diploma thesis in pharmacy together with the University of Freiburg. As I had known for a long time that I wanted to do a PhD, this thesis also served as preparation for scientific work during a PhD. Thematically, it was about new delivery technologies of the adenoviral vaccine platforms ChAdOx1 and ChAdOx2. If you want to know more, feel free to contact me, you should find me on LinkedIn. Unfortunately, I can't (or am not allowed to) tell you much more about the subject matter, but I can say that both the University of Freiburg and the University of Oxford and my working group have responded very well to my suggestions about the direction in which the project should

develop, and that this has resulted in a great and successful project! This is why I think that the University of Freiburg should strive for a closer exchange with the University of Oxford. Overall, the standards were very high and so were the expectations. Although this is not communicated directly, it quickly becomes clear that everyone here is working at a very high and fast level. But that was to be expected. For most people, however, the weekend is still a taboo, even if you sometimes can't avoid it in a biotechnology lab. Thematically, I was already well prepared in the basics after the 2nd and 3rd state examinations, and in the weeks before I read up on some specific papers. Of course, the stay was very helpful for my future career, both thematically and linguistically.

5. Criticism and recommendations

There is, and I mean this quite honestly, not much to say here. My only "criticism": It can be expensive, and you should be aware of that. Therefore, my recommendation: Start planning early and, above all, don't be shy to simply write to people and send them a speculative application, no matter how many titles the professor has and how unattainable he or she seems to you - you can't get more than a no (or no answer at all). 😊

My conclusion: The University of Oxford is and remains one of the best universities in the world and this is evident in every respect, be it in the organisation, the teaching, the researchers, the seminars, and speakers ... I can only recommend everyone to experience this once! I learned a lot for my future career and was able to make contacts here that will hopefully accompany me for the rest of my life.

All the best!