

ML Year Abroad Student Handbook

Created by students **for** students.

This Handbook has been designed to give students more detailed information about their ML Year Abroad. Please be aware that legal processes change, and student experience differs each year. **Use this as a guide, not as a rule book.**

1. Visas

Attention! A new Visa/Erasmus scheme is due to start in the UK in September 2027/28. Keep an eye on the official guidance: [UK Gov Erasmus Programme](#) (*Link accessed January 2026*).

Advice from Previous Students:

- **Use this GOV UK website to find information about visas for your chosen country:** <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/overseas-living-in-guides>
- **Visas are expensive:** They cost much more than the Study Abroad Team initially informed. Be prepared to spend approximately £1000 (in some cases), depending on the country and the length of time spent.
- **Start EARLY:** Some visas took months for one required document to be processed. Many students got their visas just days before their booked flights! *Ideal start time: March of the year of travel.*
- **Seek peer support:** The visa process is stressful, and the university can't legally offer much assistance. Reach out to your peers and previous students instead. Ask the staff to put you in contact with the relevant previous students! They have gone through the same thing.
- **The process continues abroad:** Spain, for example, issues a temporary visa that needs to be converted into a TIE by the Foreign Office once you are already in the country. Be aware of this and look into it ASAP upon arrival.

Document & Cost Example (Study Visa)

To give some insight into the number of documents required for a year abroad and their cost, please see below an example.

Everything that was required for a Study Visa in Spain (Full year) - 2024/25:

- **ACRO Police Check:** approx. £65
- **Doctor's letter:** approx. £35
- **Solicitor:** approx. £20+

- **Legalisation:** approx. £150 (depending on the number of documents).

ATTENTION! The legalisation process from the UK government takes a very long time. Ensure documents are correct before sending (e.g., signed by a solicitor, correct format).

- **Translation of documents:** approx. 150 euros. You can get deals/ discounts if you submit documents in bulk. For Spain, we recommend checking out [Trajura](#).
- **Visa Appointment fee** (London/Manchester offices): approx. £15
- **Visa fee** (once at the office with ready documents): approx. £380
- **Travel Insurance:** approx. 175 euros (This varies massively on the selected country and even placement, e.g., Universidad de Salamanca requires specific insurance that they email you to purchase).
- **TIE appointment fee:** Anticipate needing to pay this at a Spanish bank upon arrival. Santander was the only one that accepted to do this in Salamanca.
- **GHIC card:** NHS-provided card, you need to apply for this using the letter the Study Abroad team provides you with.
- On top of these required legal documents, proof of accommodation had to be arranged and purchased, as well as bank statements printed with ‘sufficient funds’ – these can be copies of your legal guardian’s statements instead of your own.

Spending a full year in Spain differed massively from spending only one semester there.

Spain (One Semester)

- Much easier and less expensive than spending a whole year in Spain. The process was typically faster, too.
- Still start early.

However, other countries, such as Belgium, had an incredibly long visa process – even for just one semester!

Belgium (One Semester)

- ‘Long, expensive, and stressful.’
- An example of part of the required visa process was getting a **Blood Test:** private medical fee was approx. £350.

Please look into the visa process well in advance, as each country differs so much.

2. Budgeting

Global Bank Accounts: Get an account that has free currency conversion. **Revolut** and **HSBC Global Money Account** are lifesavers.

Grants & Student Finance: If you are receiving Turing Scheme/Erasmus funding or your standard maintenance loan, **do not rely on it arriving on day one**. Bureaucratic delays are common. Have enough savings to cover your first month's rent and deposit. This is important to keep in mind when most visas will require a deposit placed on an accommodation months before your placement.

Student Discounts: Get an **ESNcard** (Erasmus Student Network) – European Universities will normally have guidance to connect you with the Erasmus team. They offer discounts on flights, hostels, and local attractions.

3. Transport

Don't forget to check for student discounts. With an ESN card, you can typically get a Ryanair discount with an additional free checked-in luggage! Booking in advance is often needed to secure the discounts.

Local Travel Passes: Research your city's youth travel card before you arrive.

Spain: The *Abono Joven* in Madrid is incredibly cheap for under-26s.

France: Look into the *Carte Avantage Jeune* for SNCF trains.

Italy: Check out Trenitalia's *CartaFRECCIA* youth discounts.

4. Mobile Phone Service

Local SIM Cards: Getting a local number can be very handy in ways that you may not expect. Many applications you may need, or websites you have to enter details into, may require a local number. Erasmus/ International student teams are normally good at recommending and helping you get a good SIM deal as an international student. In Salamanca (Spain), the Erasmus team actually ran an event to help get students signed up to a SIM called Lobster, a SIM which offered really cheap deals and communicated all in English.

Keeping Your UK Number: You can switch your UK SIM to a cheap pay-as-you-go or eSIM just to receive texts or anything important, without the hassle of changing your number on everything it's connected to already.

5. Studying Abroad (Partner Universities)

You will likely have to design your own timetable! Some Universities will give more guidance and warning on this than others. Do not rely on being told your timetable; reach out to the official Erasmus/International team at the University to see whether you have to design your own and how.

Bureaucracy: University admin abroad is often slower and heavily reliant on physical paper and stamps. Always bring spare passport photos and photocopies of your ID to the international office.

6. British Council

Payments: You are usually paid at the *end* of the month. In some regions, the first paycheck can be delayed until November. Have a financial buffer!

Tips:

- You aren't expected to be a fully qualified teacher on day one. You are a language and cultural ambassador.
- As an English assistant, people will want to practice their English with you constantly. Be proactive and disciplined about practising *their* language in the staffroom and outside of work.

7. Assessment (How to Pass your Year Abroad):

Study placement: As an ML student, you are **not** expected to pass the modules at your host university. To pass the year abroad, you must simply take at least 30 credits of modules and **attempt** at least 15 credits worth of exams **each semester**.

If you do not pass the exams, make sure that you have evidence of taking them, check if failed exams are included in your host university's final transcript and if not, ask the module tutor for written evidence, which you can then provide to the University of Leicester along with your overall transcript.

You will need to send the transcript (from your host university) to the Study Abroad team + to the relevant ML staff at the end of your stay at each host university. So, if you spend each semester at a different university, you will need two transcripts, which are sent as soon as you receive them at the end of each semester. Please note that sometimes you will have to prompt the university to send the transcript, and that sometimes the transcripts can take some weeks to be sent.

After your placement: During your final year (in semester 1), you will be expected to complete a summative Year Abroad Assessment. This will be a personal reflection/ overview of your skills and personal growth from your year abroad. This will consist of presentations and written summaries, which will be detailed more clearly upon returning from your placement year. However, it will be useful to consider and take note of your personal development, issues you've had to overcome, and new cultural understandings. If you create a list, a journal, or something to keep a record of these details, the final assessment will be a lot easier.

8. Socialising

It is incredibly easy to hang out only with other Brits or Americans. Join a local sports club, a university society, or a choir. It's the fastest way to make local friends and use your target language.

Language Exchanges: Search social media for language exchange nights and any other events. Erasmus typically runs lots of events to help you meet people. Erasmus also normally has social media accounts, which advertise these events! E.g. [@esnsalamanca](#) on Instagram.

9. Top Tips

Document Folder: Put your passport, visa, university acceptance letter, Global Health Insurance Card (GHIC), passport photos, and printed bank statements inside a folder which you can bring with you to registration, visa appointments, etc.

Say Yes: Go to the local festival, accept the dinner invitation from your flatmate's family, and take the impromptu weekend trip.

Homesickness is Normal: Reach out to staff at Leicester or peers—everyone feels it, even if their social media looks perfect.

Don't feel pressured: Everyone's year abroad experience will be different; some will enjoy it more than others, some will have more opportunities to meet new people or explore. Don't compare yourself to others, just do what feels right for you.

Document It: You will forget things. Keep a notes app diary, write a blog, etc.