

**EXCHANGE REPORT****Name**Anne Hardouin**Year and semester for exchange**Autumn 2025 (TARKM M2)**Exchange university**University College Dublin**Degree programme**MSc Architecture

Discovering Irish “craic” and hiking Dublin’s countryside

Before departure

I chose to go on exchange to make the most of my time as a master student and take the opportunity to discover a new country and way of learning through my studies. I was eager to discover Ireland, having visited the country already a couple of years before my exchange, and wanted a destination where I spoke the principal language of study. I also had a really good experience during my undergraduate exchange semester in Liverpool, and chose a destination that was close by, but still within the EU. However, I do find that both experiences were very different in the end. In terms of preparations, I did not need a visa or to prepare with any language courses.

Upon arrival

I arrived on the first move-in day of UCD Residences, a couple of weeks before classes started. The ResLife team ensured a smooth move-in and organized campus tours and activities to get to know others living on campus, including a live performance with traditional Irish music and dancing. The university set up welcome talks for exchange students, followed by programme-specific tours led by current students of UCD.

In terms of student clubs, UCD hosts a society fair at the start of the semester where societies aim to recruit new members. I joined the History, Dance, Musical, Drawing, Arts, Film, International Students, and the Literary & Historical (Debate) Societies. Once I had the membership, I was free to drop in at any event these societies planned throughout the school week. (I recommend following their Instagram accounts to keep up to date, in addition to @ucdpeermentors, @esnucd, @ucdsu, and @ucdreslife if living in UCD Residences.) Many of the societies also organized joint events with other societies. I really enjoyed the Debate Society, where weekly debates were organized with often humorous topics (such as “This house believes that Trinity students are undatable”), followed by wine and pizza.

University and studies

UCD is a large university campus located 30 minutes south of Dublin. Along with Trinity College Dublin, UCD is the top choice for students studying in Dublin, with UCD being more focused on technology and engineering, and TCD more on the arts and humanities. Throughout a semester, UCD is split into twelve weeks of teaching, followed by a two-week period of final exams. The exams take place in a large warehouse located outside of campus. A regular day of study at the School of Architecture consisted of coming into studio in the late morning and leaving in the early evening. Most students consistently came to studio daily, which fostered a strong studio culture. After midterm or final reviews, students would often go to the pub together for a pint. Overall, there were few exchange

or international students per year in the programme, and no exchange students in M2. As an M2 student, I was encouraged to join the M1 studio instead, as the final degree project ran through the entire year for M2 students, and I was staying only a semester. In studio, each architecture student is given their own desk and can leave material on it at all times. Unlike KTH, studio hours are restricted, with access permitted until 9:00 PM during the school week and 5:00 PM on Saturdays. The studio is closed on Sundays. Printing on plotters (one in each studio room) is also free of charge for architecture students. Studio rooms are separated by year of study; the M1 students are placed in one big room at ground level with desks aligned in multiple rows. In Richview Campus (where the School of Architecture is located), the facilities are not as new as for some other programmes. There is a small café but no kitchen space.

My studies were in English, but I had the opportunity to try the “Irish for Beginners” course for the first two weeks (which I unfortunately had to drop due to the number of credits I was taking). The course was split into one weekly lecture introducing a new topic with the professor, followed by two tutorials where we practiced pronunciation with a tutor. UCD also offers other language courses, and other (non-language) courses in Irish.

Destination and valuable tips

Dublin is a cozy and lively city. I was surprised to see how many people are walking in the streets or enjoying a pint at night on any day of the week; there is a very big pub culture in Ireland. During my time there in December, Dublin was also well decorated for the Christmas season, which made it enjoyable to stroll around. The UCD campus is located outside of the city as a “mini city” in itself. There are a wide range of facilities available on campus, including multiple gyms, a sauna, a swimming pool, a cinema, a performance space, a bookstore, sports fields (including rugby, track and field, tennis courts, etc.), and more. Contrary to KTH, the campus is not immediately connected to the city centre and requires students to take the public bus to reach it. While it runs throughout the night at frequent intervals, the bus is not always reliable and at times does not arrive as indicated on the schedule. I found myself spending most of my days on campus (which, with its 70s-dated architecture, is not as charming as Dublin, in my opinion!) and did not travel into the city as often as I would have liked. Some students who had originally applied to UCD Residences found accommodation in the city centre and commuted daily, which they preferred to having lived on campus, in the end. Many also bought bikes to commute as they could be quicker than the bus. If I had to give tips to future exchange students, I would recommend ordering the TFI Leap card (youth-discounted transport pass) ahead of time or as soon as they arrive—the bus only accepts cash!

Financials

I received the Erasmus scholarship to study at UCD. Other than rent, living costs in Dublin are generally lower than in Stockholm. A single ride in Dublin that is valid for 90 minutes on public transit (buses and trams) costs €1 for students and for youths 25 and under. The TFI Leap card can be used throughout the country, with prices increasing by a few euros based on travel distances. There were no mandatory fees, but UCD student unions ask for €2 per student club for the semester to become a member. Students living on campus also have free access to the gym. To save on grocery costs, I would recommend getting a Tesco Clubcard for reduced prices.

Accommodation

I was fortunate to be offered a corridor room on campus in Ashfield Residence, which is a 5-minute walk from the university’s main library, and about 20 minutes to Richview Campus. The corridors are often allocated to students based on their length of stay; those staying only a semester will often be grouped together, while those staying the full year (exchange or full-time students) will be placed together. The residence was in good condition despite some maintenance issues (clogged drain, burnt-out lightbulb) that were promptly dealt with by the maintenance team when reported. While UCD Residences offer different types of rooms—shared or private bathroom, double or single bed, with or without a stove in the kitchen—the overall housing cost remains quite high. This is also the case in

residences which are not affiliated with UCD in Dublin's city centre, where many exchange students who weren't offered a room were living. In terms of grocery shopping, most students living on campus take the bus to go to nearby grocery stores or walk between 20 to 30 minutes. (UCD does have a small Centra with limited selection in the UCD Village.)

Courses

I took three courses (or "modules") over the course of a semester: Comprehensive Design Project (M1 Studio integrated with Design Technologies) (ARCT41330); Conservation History, Theory and Policy (ARCT40170); and Research & Innovation in the Designed Environment (ARCT40020). The latter two are complementary seminar courses that M1 students can select.

ARCT40170 was organized as a weekly two-hour lecture during which students would take notes, with occasional guest speakers. The assessments of the semester consisted of a midterm essay focused on a site of our choice which we were tasked with arguing for its cultural significance, and a final two-hour essay with questions to answer in short essay format relating to the course content. As someone who has a particular interest in architectural history, I found the course interesting but a bit disorganized or repetitive in its lecture content. Its focus was on conservation practices in Ireland especially, while also touching on policies throughout Europe and how people's views on conservation have changed over time (ex., Unity of Style in restoration vs. minimal intervention).

ARCT40020 was divided into mini groups of various topics based on our preferred interest, but all evaluated with a final essay. I was in a group of 8 students looking at postwar New Towns in Britain. While the first couple of weeks were focused on readings and group discussions of New Towns during the one-hour class, the rest of the semester was dedicated to updating the tutor on our individual final essays one by one. The evaluation was entirely based on this essay, with 30% of the grade weighted toward the abstract, and 70% toward the final submission. I enjoyed the first few weeks but found the routine of each student presenting their progress afterwards quite monotonous.

The studio module was split into four groups—landscape, materials, housing and media. In my landscape group, all M1 students were divided into two sessions to meet with the tutors every Friday and present their progress work to the class. This was the only time we met with the tutors for a crit. The landscape group was especially free in terms of brief constraints, which was both challenging and allowed us full creative freedom. While the first task was straightforward, the following weeks were met with no guidelines and students were expected to work from there to research and develop a scheme of their own. Studio projects across the other themes were also all individual-based, but with a clearer brief. During my semester there, the landscape group was looking at repurposing out-of-use pithead baths in South Wales through exclusively digital work, with a strong emphasis on graphics.

The second component of the studio module worked in parallel with the studio project. Based on a themed weekly lecture, students developed a drawing that would inform a design technology aspect of their project (ex., structure and material specifications, detail sections of the bathrooms, etc.) Originally a separate course, Design Technologies was integrated into the studio for the first time during my semester at UCD, which proved challenging. Because the tutor was not informed of the studio tutors' briefs, the studio-wide tasks were not always relevant to the themed studios and did not correspond to the work students were doing in these groups. While the tutor gave helpful individual (optional) crits once a week, the work done in Design Technologies was only evaluated in the final portfolio at the end of the semester. As a consequence, the course became less of a priority for students, who were more focused on developing their studio projects.

Leisure and social activities

The UCD student unions and ResLife (the residence activities group) offer many opportunities for social activities! Through ResLife, UCD Residences organized movie nights in the auditorium, free cooking events, and a welcome BBQ event. On the weekends, I was often going on day trips for hikes in

Wicklow County by public transport, either with an organized group (the International Students Society) or with my flatmates. The natural landscapes are breathtaking and even include seals! UCD Global Opportunities also organized occasional free trips for exchange students to farther destinations in Ireland with transport included. At the end of November, I participated on one of those trips to Kilkenny and had the opportunity to see the Christmas markets and Kilkenny Castle. The UCD campus also has many restaurants, a cinema, and a pub with karaoke night or special events. I attended a rugby match at the UCD Bowl, where the UCD men's and women's teams often play over the weekend. In terms of contact with other students, I would say that most international/exchange students formed friend groups with other international students more often than with Irish students.

Sustainability

I was unfortunately unable to travel to UCD sustainably as my home is in another continent. Once I had arrived, however, I could walk to class and get groceries by foot. I also took public transport on the trips I organized with friends and did not travel outside of the country during the entirety of my exchange. I have heard from other exchange students that it can be difficult to travel around Ireland, especially to see the scenic landscape destinations. Because of this, many of them rented a car to reach the Ring of Kerry or the Cliffs of Moher. At the university, there are many initiatives implemented to promote sustainable practices such as providing reusable cups at cafés or organizing "Block Market" days where local and student-run businesses sell products (including thrifted clothing) on campus. Within my programme, there was also a heavy focus on sustainability through courses like "Architecture in a Climate Emergency" or in Design Technologies, where students were taught ways to consider water use, passive ventilation strategies, and smart systems.

Other recommendations and observations

Like much of Ireland, Dublin has unpredictable weather that switches from sunny skies to rain in minutes and back again. I would highly recommend being equipped with a light raincoat or an umbrella. I also did not expect the weather warnings for extreme winds, where falling branches were something to watch out for! For activities in Dublin, I would recommend getting the free IFI 25 & Under card for €5 tickets to the cinema at the Irish Film Institute.

My final tip is to go into the city centre as much as possible. It helps during the semester lows to get away from the same environment and seeing the lively city of Dublin light up (it's also a great opportunity to try out a Baby Guinness)!