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## Go Dutch, save money: British students can take degrees in English at the University of Maastricht and pay lower fees than at home

By Lucy Hodge

*Why don't more British students head to the University of Maastricht, where they can take degrees in English and – best of all – pay lower fees than at home? By Lucy Hodges*

It is a warm afternoon in May towards the end of the summer term and 10 young people on a European studies degree are gathered in a seminar room discussing the pros and cons of the Lisbon Treaty. All speak fluent English. There is some disagreement but it is expressed in a mature and thoughtful way. The most noticeable thing about the group is how pragmatic and well-informed they are about Europe, certainly by the standards of British students.

This was the University of Maastricht, situated in the picturesque Dutch town of the same name on the border of The Netherlands, Belgium and Germany, and the young people were all German, happy to be there and to be undertaking their degree in English. Why don't more British students take a leaf out of the Germans' book and hop over the Channel to Maastricht, especially as they will save money thereby? Maastricht would like them because they would improve the international mix.

The university charges £1,200 to £1,500 a year for tuition to students in the European Union who are under the age of 30. That compares with fees of £3,200 a year at British universities. Students on Masters programmes who are under 30 pay the same sum for a one-year Masters degree, which again is a lot less than they would pay in the UK.

Many of Maastricht's degrees are in English; loans are available from the Dutch government and there are generous grants, too. Moreover, Maastricht is not that far away, reachable via the Eurostar to Brussels plus another one-hour train ride, so you should not feel that you are in a remote spot far from home. For example, it takes less time to travel to Maastricht than it does to get to Edinburgh.

A European studies student Thomas Kramer, 22, a German, believes Brits should consider it and appeals to their pockets. "You can get by on 20 per cent less money here," he says.

But there is another important reason for the British to head to Maastricht and that is the teaching style. As a relatively new university, set up 30 years ago to revive the old coal-mining town, Maastricht adopted problem-based learning. This encourages students to learn by posing problems, teaching one another, making presentations, doing research and working in groups. It makes them into extremely poised young men and women who are international in their outlook because they are mixing with other young people from 50 different nationalities.

Employers love them, according to the staff, because they are so self-assured and good at talking. By contrast, many universities in the UK still use the large lecture for teaching, which means that students learn in a relatively passive way and may have minimal contact with academics because they are taught by PhD students.

As the president of Maastricht, Dr Jo Ritzen says: "Maastricht is a world-class institution. I am confident that UK students will get an even better education here and for less than half the price in the UK. And our Master's programmes are even better value."

It's not only the fees that are lower in Holland, living costs are also less expensive – estimated at about £500 a month. Rents are lower, as are prices of goods, according to Natasja Reslow, a PhD student who got her first degree from the University of Edinburgh and is now undertaking a doctorate at Maastricht. Students live in houses in town or in villages in Holland and Belgium where rents are lower still.

This lack of a campus is what distinguishes Maastricht from many British universities – though the university is building one the other side of the river Maas, which will have halls of residence and sports facilities.

Faculty buildings are housed in lovely old buildings around town. There is an impressively-equipped library and a large and cheap cafeteria but students don't have the wealth of student union and other facilities that you find in the UK. Moreover, if gritty, urban edge is your scene, Maastricht, the town, has less of it than you would get in a British city. But what it lacks in inner-city edge it makes up for in quality of life and cleanliness. You could fry the proverbial German sausage on the pavements of the town. And around Maastricht is gorgeous countryside of rolling hills and unspoilt villages.

Another big difference for the British is that, like other Continental universities and as a Dutch institution, Maastricht does not select its students, except those at its university college. This latter institution within the university is another innovation – and would suit ambitious students from the UK who are keen to follow a broad programme of study and spend a semester abroad.

"This is very much an open curriculum, so students choose their courses," says Professor Louis Boon, the dean of the university college. "We get students who come here and say they are interested in psychology and then take a course in economics and find they prefer that." The college is not unlike America's Brown University or Sarah Lawrence College, he says.

The teaching at Maastricht is legendary, which is partly why so many Germans flock across the border to get the personal attention and English-language courses that are lacking at home. But a Briton would notice the lack of emphasis on research. "Our reputation is mainly in teaching," says Boon. "In research we have always been struggling to keep up."

The British students at the university tend to be unusual. For example, Alexandra Chorlton, 19, did the International Baccalaureate at the United World College in Wales, and was actively seeking an international university. Ariane Sketcher, 21, grew up in Germany. "Being here broadens your mind and you get to see something else," she says.

Frank Rowley, 22, who attended Cherwell College in Oxford for his A-levels, chose Maastricht because it was cheaper and closer to Luxembourg where he lives. An Irish student, Julie Martin, 28, believes that Brits should come because it would open their eyes. "With this kind of learning system, you sit down and discuss things with people from other cultures. That really teaches you about the world."

And Glenn Borrett, who already has a degree from the University of the West of England, and is undertaking a second degree at Maastricht, endorses the importance of acquiring an international outlook. Moreover, he won't be clocking up any debts from this degree in Holland, he says.

"I have a job at the university, and so do a lot of students," he says.

"It's easy to live here, the social life is good and so is the sport."

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## Maastricht University in a nutshell

**Age:** 30.

**Number of students:** 13,500.

**Where do they come from:** A quarter are German, a quarter are neither Dutch nor German and a half are Dutch.

**What's its USP?** Teaching by problem-based learning which means that students set their goals in advance for each assignment, and then research and come up with the answers which they present to one another in seminars.

**Degrees available in:** European studies, economics and business, art and culture, computer science, health, law, psychology. **Why should Brits attend?** They will save money and acquire an international outlook.



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