

Ask Aberdeen Episode 6 transcript

Life as an International Student

Georgie [00:00:07] I'm Georgie.

Michaela [00:00:08] And I'm Michaela.

Georgie [00:00:09] And we're here to tell you about the University of Aberdeen.

Michaela [00:00:11] In each episode, we will discuss frequently asked questions about topics such as applications...

Georgie [00:00:15] Go abroad...

Michaela [00:00:17] Student life...

Georgie [00:00:18] Sports and Society's...

Michaela [00:00:19] Budgeting for Uni...

Georgie [00:00:20] And life in Aberdeen.

Michaela [00:00:22] We will be speaking to current Aberdeen students, those who really know what it's like to study and live here.

Georgie [00:00:27] And we'll be getting exclusive tips from members of our amazing staff.

Michaela [00:00:31] Join us for this episode of Ask Aberdeen.

Michaela [00:00:35] Hi, welcome to the podcast, I'm so glad that you've joined us for this episode, whether it's your first one or you've listened to some of our previous topics. And because I have a feeling that today's episode is going to be really interesting, we're going to chat about what it is like to be an international student in Aberdeen and in Scotland in general. And we have two fantastic guests here today. And we will hear from a current student, Jack, who is from the US. And we will also talk to Frances, who is an international officer, and she speaks to students moving to Scotland from abroad daily. So, Jack, would you like to tell us a little bit about yourself?

Jack [00:01:09] Hi, Jack. Yeah, I grew up and lived my entire life in Los Angeles, California, and I moved to Aberdeen for university two years ago for my second year, I study psychology as an undergraduate.

Michaela [00:01:27] You're in your third year, is that right?

Jack [00:01:28] I just finished my third year and I'm going into my fourth year.

Michaela [00:01:31] And Frances, would you like to just give us a little bit about yourself?

Frances [00:01:35] Yeah, of course. My name is Frances McBean and I'm one of the international recruitment officers for the University of Aberdeen. And I've kind of had a couple of jobs at university. I, first of all, worked alongside yourself in the UK team for about a year and a half, I think, and then moved over to the international recruitment team.

My main focus is usually of students from China and Hong Kong. Erm, we kind of all have different regions within our own office that we look after and, but we are quite flexible. So I do speak to a lot of students from other countries as well.

Michaela [00:02:08] So you'll be able to give us a little bit of a holistic overview of what everyone does in addition to Jack's personal experience.

Frances [00:02:15] Yes, hopefully, hopefully.

Michaela [00:02:18] Hopefully it's going to be useful for everyone who listens. Of course, we know that there is quite a huge variations depending on where you're from. But Jack is here to give you his experience of what it was like to move to Aberdeen. And hopefully anyone will find some of it, at least some of it useful. So, first of all, Jack, why did you decide to branch out and consider studying outside of your country of origin?

Jack [00:02:41] I was always interested in going abroad for university, particularly in Scotland, in the UK. But I did actually do my first year of undergraduate at an American university. So I went to Brandeis University, which is in Waltham, right outside Boston. And I, I have not applied to University of Aberdeen or any Scottish universities my first time around, just sort of chickened out at the last minute. And I was like, you know, I'll just end up going here. And I just didn't feel like it was a really good fit for me. I didn't feel very well taken care of there and I just felt sort of lost, you know, I thought university and sort of halfway through my first semester, I was like, you know what? Why don't I just take the jump? I'll just transfer or, you know, attempt to transfer, as it were, to Scottish University. So I made my application. I applied to Aberdeen and I got in and I decided, you know, go and transfer. Also, it's a lot cheaper here than it is to go to uni in the States. So that was a consideration for me as well. But yeah, so I ended up moving here and now I plan to stay in Scotland for an indeterminate amount of time.

Michaela [00:04:01] Yeah, well, we would love to keep you. Of course.

Jack [00:04:04] Yeah, well I am you know, I really love it here. I really love the university and yeah, I don't think I'll be going back. I won't be going back to the States to live. I would be staying in Scotland after I graduate and immigrating here. So. Yeah.

Michaela [00:04:21] So did you visit Scotland at any point before you apply or did you just sort of just apply without having ever visited the country?

Jack [00:04:30] So I visited once before I applied. I went to Edinburgh for a day. I came to Aberdeen for a day because those were the two main universities I was interested in. I was in Dundee for like thirty minutes, which I was also interested in Dundee. I didn't get the opportunity to stay there. So yeah, I had visited once before, but that's it.

Michaela [00:04:55] Well, I mean, clearly we made a great impression on you because here you are. Um, but Frances, I know that Scottish system is quite might be quite unique and might be quite different from other higher education systems in the world. Would you mind explaining how it works?

Frances [00:05:11] Yeah, of course. So Jack might be obviously quite familiar with it because it is very similar to the system in the US. We have a four year degree for undergraduate studies. And this gives students the flexibility to their degree. So you obviously choose like your course subject that you want to sort of spend four years of your

life studying. But whilst in first and second year you actually get a lot of flexibility there, so you can choose different modules to kind of build up credits in your degree, and there obviously are some things that might not be included in lots of things, like medicine is obviously just very focused, and that's a slightly longer degree. But for the majority of the degrees in Scotland, you're looking at 4 years. And that first and second year is very, very flexible. It's quite nice just to give students a wee bit of time away from their main focus of their studies, a little bit of a sort of difference in things that they're studying and just a little bit of variety really, as well. And if you've got the urge then, I really would quite like to study business management alongside my history degree, then as long as the timetable allows it, then you're more than welcome to do that. But yes, some students come in from the States might be familiar with a four year system because it is very similar. But a lot of students that I speak to and from different regions of the world are maybe used to the three year degree system, which is the English system. And so we quite like to sort of make them aware of that four year degree and the flexibility that you get within your first and second year. You also have opportunities to swap your degree over. So if you maybe choose, your main degree is history in first year and you study maybe some politics and business management alongside that through your first and second year, and if you prefer maybe a business management or the politics side more, then you can actually look to see if there's the opportunity to swap over and come out with maybe the politics or the business management degree instead. And so there's there is the opportunity there for students was definitely something to keep in mind and that you've got that range and that sort of variety and flexibility there for you.

Michaela [00:07:24] Go ahead, Jack.

Jack [00:07:24] Well, I was just going to expand on that because I've sort of a pretty clear experience with that. So one of the reasons I hesitated to apply to the UK general my first time around was because I really wanted to sort of be able to take classes outside of my main focus. So that's one of the reasons I chose a U.S. university. But I ended up getting really frustrated because there's so many prerequisites you have to take in subjects you're not even interested in by the time you know, even by the time you're at the end of your first year, I felt at least that I was wasting a lot of my time taking courses in subjects that I really didn't have an interest in just to fill your ex. And what I do really like about this college system is you still have those first two years to take classes, you know, that you might just have an interest in. Like, for example, I took a class in Celtic folklore and religion and that was really fun. I enjoyed that class. But I don't obviously study that for degree because I do psychology. It's quite different. So I sort of like that that blend that you get in the Scottish system where you can still explore things in your first two years, but you still feel like you're doing important work for your degree and not just sort of spending your time in places that you feel isn't getting you further along in that degree.

Michaela [00:08:47] Yeah, that's definitely one of the advantages and maybe the differences from other systems where, you know, you have to take certain things, but also you get the opportunity to just branch out and explore and see what you like the best yourself and what's best for yourself. And then, of course, you like Frances. Like I said, if you find that you really want to swap into a joint degree and do two subjects together after you applied for single honours degree, I mean, that's perfectly fine. So it's quite nice to have that flexibility and not be locked into one degree as soon as you come in, especially if you don't really know what it's like if you are, you know, like I didn't do politics at high school level and I applied for it and I had no idea what to expect. So it's always nice to get that sort of security blanket almost and the feeling that you can swap if you need to swap.

Frances [00:09:39] I think another thing just to keep in mind as well is that some students maybe aren't aware that it's the same level of degree between Scotland and England. So even though you might see a three year degree system and it might be labelled as one, maybe you might see them labelled across the UK as a masters or an undergraduate and you just sort of or a like a BA. Keep in mind is that no matter where you apply within the UK is the same level of degree that you're getting at the end. For some reason, the Scottish system just has them named slightly differently. And just with the sort of history of the education system in Scotland. So we split them into two different degrees, like the arts side of degrees and then there'll be the science side of degrees. So that might be where you see those slight differences in the name of the degree. But at the end it's the same thing.

Jack [00:10:36] Psychology is a really interesting case of that, because the psychology degree is offered as both Masters of Art and a Bachelors of Science and the courses are exactly the same. The only thing that changes is some of the electives and things you can take in the first two years are a wee bit different. But the core courses of psychology are exactly the same. So, as you said, it does really mean it's the same sort of classification or whatnot.

Michaela [00:11:03] And Frances, do you know how like how big are the classes? You know, some people might be coming from countries where classes are just massive. Some people might not know what to expect. How does it work when it comes to actually sitting in a room with other people?

Frances [00:11:18] So it's quite nice, actually. We've got like a range of different class sizes and also a range of different types of teaching. So you've got a lot more classes will be either if you're in a tutorial or like a seminar, which is a smaller group, and then this will probably be maybe around about 20 to 30 people. And obviously it can vary slightly from course to course, but that's the sort of general sizing. And you might find some of the more practical classes or it's maybe lab time. If it's a science degree, then the numbers might be slightly smaller because they'll be restricted with the sort of health and safety or the equipment that they've got on offer. And things like a lecture will be when you're in that sort of traditional lecture hall within the university. And that could have a few hundred people within that class. And they won't all be from your specific degree. They'll be from maybe your school or be from the School of science and they'll be maybe people there from medicine, people there from biology, people they're from in chemistry and physics. You have students from all of these other different types of degrees. But because it falls under the same school within the university, that's what we would classify for the sort of lectures. But Jack will probably be able to give you maybe examples from his class sizes that he currently is in at the moment.

Jack [00:12:34] I know, psychology is really interesting because first of all, we have our own school, so it's sort of much more condensed with the amount of degrees you have going on. But I have to say our principal classes, so my lectures, can be anywhere from 50 to over 100 people. You know, those are quite large lectures. But then I also have tutorials which are just, you know, smaller sort of classes, and those will have as little as 10 to 20 people in them. So you really do get that even in psychology, which is a pretty popular degree, if I understand correctly, you do get quite a range in class sizes, depending on, you know, which of which classroom. And so but I know some of my flatmates, for example, they study one of them studies Film, the other one studies linguistics. And they're their classes are much smaller, around 20 people, sometimes at tutorials of less than 10.

So it really depends, you know, what you're studying. But you certainly do get those small classes here.

Michaela [00:13:42] And also, as you go on in your degree, the classes tend to get smaller. So in politics, first two years, we started with about like two hundred people in a lecture and then the tutorials, you know, there was a lot of different groups. But as the time went on and you got more specialised and you went on your own little path, you were in smaller and smaller lecture and classes and you couldn't get away with not really attending lectures anymore because since there was like 30 of you, you know, it would be very noticeable when you skipped a lecture. But also, France is something that stuck in my mind, Jack, you mentioned that it was cheaper for you to actually come to Scotland. How can people find out what the tuition fees are and what scholarships are available for the programme that they're interested in?

Frances [00:14:27] So when you go onto our website and you search for the degree that you're interested in, aim across the top of the website, you've actually got different sort of tabs that you can click on. And that will actually have the option to take you to the tuition fee for that same course that you're interested in. It will detail courses and the prices for students who are from the EU and from the rest of the UK and also international fees as well. And so that's quite good that you've got that sort of access there straightaway. You can see the different pricing for different courses. Usually they do tend to be roughly the same across most of the degrees. But there are those handful that might be slightly more expensive because of the sort of nature of the degree. And so, for example, maybe like medicine, I know I mentioned medicine earlier, so probably crop up again. But that does tend to be a slightly higher fee cost. And in terms of sort of scholarships, we actually have huge of a range of scholarships on offer for students. So a lot of people don't apply to them because they maybe think, oh, I'm not going to get chosen if there's an application process or I don't really have time. But one thing to keep in mind is that a lot of our scholarships are automatic, so you don't need to do anything. So, for example, students from the States, we have a merit-based scholarship. So this offers a range of different tuition fee discounts, depending on their grades from high school. And but you can also have ones that you apply for. So there might be an application process. And just to keep in mind that you might want to give yourself a little bit of time to deal with this, and you don't want to leave these application processes for scholarships right to the last minute. So please give yourself time. But there's loads on offer. Again, you can just search for funding. When you search that on our website and it does just pull up a funding database and you can narrow it down by popping in your in your degree that you're interested in what level of study and your nationality. And then they'll pull up a list of all the different scholarships that would be available for you as a student.

Michaela [00:16:34] We're going to link this in our show notes as well, if you're interested in having a look at that. So we're thinking about, you know, the move and actually moving to university if you're moving from far away. One of the biggest concerns that you might have might be accommodation from how you can find a flat to how much it costs. And Jack, where did you live in your first year or your first year in Aberdeen anyway?

Jack [00:16:58] So I lived in the student accommodation. I lived in Fife House, which is part of the Hillhead student village, which is just a wee bit north of the campus. You know, you walk through Seaton Park so like ten minutes or so. And I really, really enjoyed it. It felt very communal. I made a lot of friends there. And there's the number 20 bus is nice because that goes right to, you know, it goes just right there to the accommodation. So that was always very nice. I actually really like where the Hillhead student villages because

you get that nice walk through Seaton Park, which is absolutely beautiful, you know, every day when you go on the campus or whatever. So, yeah, that's where I lived my first year.

Michaela [00:17:40] I absolutely loved living in Hillhead as well, because you're there with about 2,000 other people who are all in the same situation. You know, having moved, a lot of them will have moved even if they moved from Edinburgh, you know, they'll still be finding out where to go for classes, what is there to do in Aberdeen. So, you know, even if you're coming from further away, you will still be in that same situation. And there are people there who are actually there to help you during the day. During the night. There's always going to be someone to talk to. There's going to be always a place where you can hang out. So that's a really lovely communal feel. And I absolutely love Seaton Park as well. Apart from, like winter. I don't know, Jack, if you ever had, like, one of those, like skating/sprints to classes where it was like January and there's like frost on the ground and you're just sliding down the hill and, like, clawing your way up the hill in Hillhead,

Jack [00:18:33] one of my friends, he actually bruised his tailbone because he slipped on the ice during the winter. So it can be quite treacherous when it freezes.

Michaela [00:18:45] Yeah, but to be fair, it doesn't get that cold here in Aberdeen that often because we're right by the sea. So it doesn't happen too often. More often you're going to struggle with, like, you know, the sun being too bright, than there being too much ice. But when it does ice over, it's fun for sure. Nobody knows how to deal with it suddenly.

Jack [00:19:05] Yeah. I was especially captivated by the wee bit of snow. We didn't get much snow two years ago, but this year we got quite a bit of snow. And of course, you know, coming from Los Angeles, it never snowed ever. It doesn't snow there. So me and my flatmates quite a few times, just went outside, had snowball fights, built snowmen, you know, things like that that I never got to do as a child. So that was really fun. And I really think we got a nice amount of snow here. You know, it's just enough to be fun, not enough that it's really that inconvenient.

Frances [00:19:39] Like, it's as you say, it's quite good because there may be people coming from all over the world eating horror stories about the weather in Scotland. But it's nice for you to see. Actually, it's not as bad as you might think. Like, obviously, the winters are going to be a lot cooler than you may be used to if you're coming from a warm area of the world. But we're quite like an average climate throughout the year. So we don't have scorching sort of high heat in the summer. And then, like freezing winters, it's it usually is quite mild and as Michaela said as well with we've been so close to the seaside, if there is any sort of snow that you see in the way forecast in Scotland, it's usually more in the central belt. But we're kind of right on the North Sea where the sea air tends to stop any snow ice kind of forming. But it's quite nice. And when we do have snow or this or frosty winters, when students who are international who have maybe never experienced this in their lifetime get a chance to play in the snow. So it's definitely fun for students, but also staff as well. I'm not going to pretend that we are all working away thinking, oh, we've got loads of work to do when the snow is falling and we are in our office. I'm wishing I'm outside playing in that snow as well.

Jack [00:20:54] And also, I will say I think we get a surprising amount of sun. People will agree on this, but I will die on this hill. I think we got a lot of sun here, in my opinion, enough that, you know, I can sit outside at least a couple times a week, you know, soaking up the sun a wee bit. So I also enjoy that. I think it's much sunnier here than people give credit to.

Michaela [00:21:18] Well, I mean, we are well known as the sunniest city in Scotland, well known by, you know, Aberdonians.

Jack [00:21:28] Dundonians will disagree with you, but, yeah,

Michaela [00:21:30] I know, honestly, it's a constant battle with the Dundonians. It's like, you know, Aberdonians claim that we have the sunniest city in Scotland. So we'll go with that because Jack just confirmed that it's sometimes it's sunny and he comes from California. So he knows what he's talking about.

Frances [00:21:48] He knows his stuff. Well, the thing that I love and you're probably aware of, Jack, is the daylight hours in Scotland, particularly so far up north and Aberdeen are just amazing, like in the summer at the moment. For example, the sun will start coming up before 4:00 a.m. in the morning, three and four a.m. and it won't really go down until like it won't be black or dark at night time until about eleven half past eleven at night. Like, I just think that that's brilliant. Like, I was out on a walk the other evening after finishing work and it was quite late, but there were still daylight and this was about 10:00 p.m. at night. And so I think that's one thing I personally love is how long the summer days are. And that sort of runs from what may be may through to August, September time. It's just lovely.

Jack [00:22:40] Yeah, no, absolutely agreed, it is a bit sort of surreal for me, again, because I come from so far down south, close to the equator, it's still quite light outside when I'm going to bed at like 10:30, 11, like I would I would even say it's pitch black at 11:30. It's still sort of the sun's gone down, but it's still sort of like a late twilight. Yeah. So that is nice.

Michaela [00:23:05] Yeah, it makes you realise how far north we actually are, but, you know, it's still we're still on the same island as London. It's just that we're a little bit further up and it makes a difference in the summer because you don't realise how late it's getting because it's just so bright outside. And when you move to this might be a little bit of a surprise when you move to Scotland, as you know, your first year and moving into accommodation. But don't worry, our accommodation does have great blinds. I can attest to that. So you can roll those down and sleep through the four a.m. sunrises. And Frances, just going back to the process of applying for accommodation. When should I, as an international applicant, start worrying about looking for accommodation and applying for accommodation?

Frances [00:23:53] So once you've firmly accepted an unconditional offer to the university, then you can start the application process so the university will make your offer and then that's when you can kind of start getting the ball rolling and just make sure if you do have any questions or there's loads of different ways that you can get in touch with those, you can contact us on UniBuddy, you can send emails to international officers, you can get in touch with the accommodation team themselves, sort of anyone, really, if you do want to double check anything. But yeah, you can go on to the website. There's an online application system is relatively straightforward and we've got a guaranteed offer of accommodation for first year students and particularly sort of international first year students. So you've got that option there for you as well. So you know that you're going to have somewhere to come to. Don't leave it to last minute, because I think particularly for any student that I definitely international students, you've got a lot of things that you need to do. So you've got to apply for your visa. You've got to get flights booked. You've got to

maybe send over things like your clothes or some household items. You've got to think about all of these things. And so it can be quite a long process to get everything completed. So just one thing to keep in mind is don't leave it to the last minute to apply for accommodation. And there is a deadline. I think it's in the summer. And so make sure that you apply by that deadline. But the accommodation section of our website is really, really helpful. That's got all of the information you're going to need. And you can just have a look through there to see when you can apply the application form, what types of accommodation are on offer and also the types and the sort of prices as well that we have there. So I would definitely say even just to have we look around to the accommodation section is really good to do.

Michaela [00:25:49] And speaking about the different types of accommodation, what if I'm a bit older or I don't really drink alcohol or, you know, I prefer a quiet space? Is there is there any sort of option to choose to live in a quieter block?

Frances [00:26:04] Yeah, of course. No, we've got loads of different types of accommodation on offer. So we've got the standard range of catered and self catered. So you can choose between those options. We have en suite accommodation if you prefer your own private bathroom, and then we also have the opportunities for students to choose quieter blocks or non-alcoholic blocks. So if you would prefer to have either of those as your sort of choice, then you can just choose that within and your application. And there's loads and loads of different types on offer for types of accommodation on offer for students. So you can definitely kind to be quite particular about what options you would like to have. But to answer your question, we've got the option there for students to erm choose non-alcoholic quiet blocks, things like that.

Michaela [00:26:56] And also the one thing that people might not expect coming from abroad, because, you know, you see it in American movies all the time. Americans, they often share a room with someone else. But in the UK we don't really do that. So you will definitely have your own room. We do not do any doubles, you know, shared with someone else. So you can always just have your own space, which is really nice. It's also a really handy space because the Hillhead student village is actually really close to the Aberdeen airports, which is an international airport, and I personally use it a lot. And it's just like, what, 10, 15, 20 minutes taxi journey away from Hillhead?

Jack [00:27:36] Yeah, it's really nice. It's really nice having the airport that close. You know, if you come in late or something, that's genuinely 10 to 15 minutes by cab. And it's a pretty cheap cab as well because it's pretty short. You can also take the bus pretty easily, although that takes around 45 minutes to an hour. But if you just take a cab and there's always cabs, they're pretty much it's only, you know, 20 quid or less and. Yeah, like ten to 15 minutes. That's nice. And I did want to say having the individual room for accommodation was absolutely luxurious compared to my first year at American University. I couldn't believe I had my own room. I was so, so excited to have my own room. So, yeah, I know it's definitely a part of the fabric of the University. I guess that you do get your own room.

Frances [00:28:27] because you do still have that communal space, like, for example, that you have your kitchen space, which is got maybe like a couch that you can relax and there's central spaces within the hill hit central building so that you do still have that sort of opportunity there to meet and socialise with people. But I think it's really nice for students to know, actually, if you do just need a bit of time to yourself, and you like your own space

and you like having your own bedroom, you've definitely got that in guaranteed every bedroom as private bedrooms.

Michaela [00:29:01] Yeah. Which also does help with the the transition that you don't immediately need to be best friends with everyone. You can sort of do it at your own pace, in your own time. But you do have a set group of people that live with you that you will be interacting with daily. So they're pretty much, you know, automatically you have a little group of friends that you don't need to work to have. You just automatically get people. And we don't assign by like courses, like you're not grouped with other people who are doing just psychology. It's a mixture. It's a mixture of different nationalities. We do not have just UK students block and just international students, but it's all mixed together. So you will really meet a lot of different people from all over the world. And usually our flats tend to be single sex. But you can also request mix the gender flats if you prefer that. So, you know, there's a lot of different options. And you absolutely, you know, if you go for Hillhead, you will you will be secure and you will be taken care of because those guys know what they're doing. But say I've just moved in, I am jet lagged after my 12 hour flight. You know, I'm confused. I don't know where any of the uni buildings are. That might be the thought that you have, what will I do after I move in? But you don't really have to worry about, like, doing much yourself, like, you know, finding out where things are because the university is here to help. So during first week of uni when you just after you move in and the week before teaching actually starts full time. There's a number of events which are collectively called Freshers Week or a welcome week. Jack, can you tell us what Freshers Week is?

Jack [00:30:48] You know, so Freshers week was really fun. It kicks off sort of there's a there's a what's it called like a reception and desk and everything for students at Hillhead. So it starts out with a few introductory events there, which are really nice, sort of just making sure everyone's settled and all that. And then for Freshers Week, it's just a myriad of daily events for first time students. And I can't remember or recall them all here, but it's safe to say there's quite a few every day. And I was also happy that there was a lot of them. Like I think a lot of people have the perception that all the social culture is just going to be drinking or something like that. But the majority of the events not weren't, you know, going out to the pub or whatever they were. You know, there was a lot of open days for things. I got to try archery, actually, as part of the club's open day, which I thought was really fun. And so they have open days for a lot of the societies, obviously meetings for a lot of the societies and stuff, introductory things, and then just a lot of other social events that are really fun. From that, I ended up sort of having a large group of about 10 to 15 people that we all just sort of gathered to go to. Those things ended up getting really close with them. So, yeah, I was actually very impressed with the fresher's events. There was a lot more sort of an effort to promote, you know, socialisation than I had seen or expected. So yeah.

Michaela [00:32:26] Yeah. Societies fair and sports fair, those are the two sort of, I would say, the most popular events that happened during that week, because that's just like there's usually a really big fair over two days where you go in and there are all these stalls with different people from different societies and sports teams, and they try to convince you to join them for a taster class. So, you know, like Jack tried archery. I tried Glee Club didn't work out too well, I have to say. But, you know, you just get to try all these different things for free usually, and then you can decide if you want to sign up and do it full time. Did you stick with archery?

Jack [00:33:05] No, I did not stick with archery purely though, just because I ended up being on the water polo team, because that's what I did in high school. So I was like, you know, I'm going to get back into water polo. So I did that instead. But I was tempted to join the archery team. I thought it was really fun.

Michaela [00:33:23] See, and it's never too late to do that again, so if you if you still wanted to join, that's perfectly fine. A lot of people will try joining absolutely everything in first and second year and then sort of figure out what they enjoy the most. But, you know, you can also just like the Quidditch club that we had and we had a Quidditch team when I was in, you know, a few years ago, it only lasted one year. But, you know, people tried. I did not end up joining because I think I was a bit sceptical about the whole setup of flying on brooms around in public. Wasn't too keen on that. But I do know if you come up with that Quidditch club team idea that you want to set up again, you can do that as well. The uni is all about doing new stuff and trying new things. So please do come to Aberdeen and set up a Quidditch team. I am now ready to join you guys and fly around on broomsticks. So, you know, Fresher's Week is just such a big event and you will meet a lot of people. You will get a lot of opportunities. But there's also a practical side of things that you will get to sort out during that week. Frances, would you mind telling us a little bit about what sort of induction events there might be for international students?

Frances [00:34:37] Yeah, of course. So there'll be a couple of things to keep in mind is that I think they'll do like they can offer things like a campus tour, because obviously it's maybe your first time that you've been to the university. You might have seen pictures or you might have spoken to someone and heard about it. But if you think actually I could just do with a campus tour and get a look around and someone to show me and the different sort of buildings for the different classes take place and where the library is and where the student union is. And then you can do things like that. A lot of the sort of international officers will also hold things called pre-departure events or maybe offer holder events. So you may attend in country when we start travelling again, but we're also holding things online at the moment. So this is actually where you can speak to the international officer that's responsible for your region and we can talk to you about the sort of getting settled into campus, talking to you about the accommodation. We can talk to you about the campus and the sort of spaces that you can make useful for your studying. So there's loads and loads of different things that you can use these pre departure meetings for. And it's just a really good way as well. When we are in country and we offer these to students. And it's a good way to meet sort of other people from your country that will also be moving over to Aberdeen to study at university. So it kind of gives you a friendship group before you've even come to university, which is really nice, and that usually the students will kind of help and support each other with sort of any final things that need to get prepared for moving over to Aberdeen. And so that's the sort of things that we would handle with an international officer. But I think the sort of student union will put a lot of things on for international students as well. And we also have the international centre, which is a great building on campus that students can get involved with. Different cultural events and different and sort of festivals throughout the year as well. So it's a really, really good thing that you can get involved with when you're on campus, even if it's just you want to learn about a different festival with a different culture than your home country. It's a really good thing and quite often have I think a lot of things are revolving around food. So I would definitely say if you're a foodie, it's probably good to go make use of international centre.

Michaela [00:37:02] Yeah, they have Thanksgiving. Um, I know that for sure. And they also do a pumpkin carving and they like watch movies and pumpkin carve and all of that stuff. And obviously they do stuff for the Chinese New Year as well. So if you ever feel

homesick, the International Centre might actually be quite a good place to go because of these events that run throughout the year and also because it's just a meeting place for people who might be wanting to go abroad from Aberdeen. They might be from Aberdeen City and they might be thinking about going to the US, for example, and might be a nice way to sort of meet someone who is interested in your culture and is looking for more information, you know, and that way you get to share about yourself and about your country. Right, Jack? And you spoke about the water polo sports team that you're on. Would you mind telling us about all these different things that you guys do? How does that work?

Jack [00:37:54] Yeah. Yeah, so the water polo team, like a lot of other sports at the university, we practise at the Aberdeen sports village, which there is a membership fee for. But if you're a member or if you're a member of the university, a student, you got to have a discount and you actually don't need to pay just to play at the sport. So, like, if I just want to go in and do water polo, that would be it. But I also use the gym, so I got a discount for that, but anyway, we practise about three times a week for a couple of hours, which I think is the perfect amount. It's not so much that it conflicts with, you know, study or anything like that, but it's enough that you actually feel like you're doing good work. We go on, we do tournaments, we do games, things like that. Obviously with covid, that's a bit difficult. So we haven't done that this year. But the year before that we did. And I'm sure this I hope this upcoming year that we're going to be doing that quite a bit. And one of the things I really liked about at least the water polo team here, and I think it's very similar for a lot of the other sports teams here, is that it didn't feel too intimidating like that. You still play the other universities regionally and even, you know, depending on where you get to, you can globally as well. But it's still pretty relaxed enough. It's not nearly as intense as I would expect from like an American university, for example, just because that's my frame of reference. So it's really just sort of a social group that are all really passionate about the same thing as opposed to anything else. So, yeah, I think it's a really nice sort of community to have. When you join a sports club like that or something or just a society, I think it functions pretty much the same way.

Michaela [00:39:43] And while you actually have played water polo before, there's also the possibility for anyone to join any new team and try new sport that they've never done before. Like archery, I presume you haven't really done archery before. You tried it, did you?

Jack [00:39:57] No, I've never done it before. But with water polo, for example, we have several people on the team who never played water polo before. And water polo a pretty it's a pretty intense sport. Like there's a lot of training for it. You're treading water the whole time. There's a lot of swimming. So it's a pretty intimidating sport just to join the team for. But there's quite a few people who just, you know, decided to do it. And, you know, they now play on the team. They're full members. You know, there's and, you know, we're happy to have them. And it's good, I think. With my experience with the water polo team and what I've heard from other sports clubs is that it's very easy to just walk on and try it out and join the team. It's really open to anyone. And with all the teams, like, you can just go in not knowing anything and you'll be on the team and functioning as part of the sport in no time, really.

Michaela [00:40:50] And that's also a really fantastic way of meeting friends as well, because you're very likely to socialise outside of those training sessions as well.

Jack [00:40:59] Yeah, no, absolutely. Actually, at least the water polo team and most of the sports teams, if not all of them, have, you know, social secretaries and people who support social events. So it's a very sort of well organised effort for sports teams and societies to do social events. Additionally, I'm the welfare officer for the water polo team and many of the teams have the same thing. So we also have a pretty good framework to best support people and to make sure that our team and the environment around us is being a supportive and inclusive as it possibly can. So there is a really good framework set up for people even outside of just playing the sport.

Michaela [00:41:43] Yeah, and that is also something that if you get involved in being a member of the committee, that is something you can use in the future for your CV, for applying for jobs. So we always encourage people to get involved in societies, sports teams and get that sort of experience, because it will look really good for you that you might have while also having a part time job and also studying at university. You also organised pub crawls for your team. I mean, that's going to look fantastic. Obviously, you can word it a little bit differently for your future employer, but yeah, you have a lot of fun and you're also working on your future, which is fantastic. And you, as you mentioned a couple of times, you're from Los Angeles and then you lived in Boston before moving to Aberdeen. That must have been quite a culture shock coming from those big cities and on another continent coming to Aberdeen. And now that you've been here for, what, two or three years, how would you describe the city to others who might be considering moving here?

Jack [00:42:41] So I personally love Aberdeen very, very much. After I get my go and get my masters and hopefully my doctorate, I would not be surprised if they came back and lived here, I suppose. Well, I would describe Aberdeen, it's a beautiful and fun place to live. It can be challenging to visit the first time I visited Aberdeen, it was early January. So it was the middle of winter and going from such a large city as Boston or Los Angeles and coming here, you know, it's the third largest city in Scotland, but that's only 200,000 people on that or so. So there's a really nice main street and there's a lot of really nice nooks and crannies. But it can be somewhat of a shock when you land the first time and you're like, oh, this is city centre. This is where the university is, especially if you come from a city where there's a lot of people. But the way I always describe Aberdeen is: There's enough that you always have something to do, but not so much that you won't ever do it all. So that's sort of my philosophy. Also, with the beach and all the beautiful sort of nature centres, you've got you've got Duffie Park, you've got so many beautiful green spaces. So, yeah, I would I think Aberdeen is such a fun place to sort of find your little places and like find your guide to the city. That is going to be so unique and so sort of special to you.

Michaela [00:44:17] And I'm sorry to bring this stereotype up, but you being from California, have you done surfing in our beautiful North Sea and on the beach?

Jack [00:44:27] So I haven't gone surfing, but I have started recently see swimming. Yeah, I know. So yesterday actually I went and I've been going in every couple days and it's doable, like, it's cold when you get in. It's the North Sea after all. But really especially in the summer, you know, you just jump in for a bit and come out and then just lay on the sand and there's sun. And it's really it's not quite like you're in Los Angeles on the beach, but if you squint your eyes, it's sort of like it. But I do see surfers. The surfers are occasionally so especially if you have like a wetsuit or something, you certainly can. It's a really nice beach. You know, obviously, it can be somewhat cold at times. But other than that, it's a really nice stretch of sand, really nice sort of waves. And the beach is actually one of the reasons I was really interested in Aberdeen initially, because I always want to live close to

the sea, you know, because I well, I grew up pretty close to the sea and sort of one of my long term dreams from when I was a kid is I'd be able to see the ocean from my window. And I thought, that's something I'm never going to be able to accomplish or whatnot. And I can see the ocean out my window in my in my little student flat. So that's, you know, really, really special to me. And I think the ocean and all that really sort of characterises the seagull. I actually got my first tattoo a couple of weeks ago, and it's a seagull. So the ocean and the seagulls that brings in all that is really important to me.

Michaela [00:46:06] Is the seagull stealing a chip?

Jack [00:46:09] No, it's not. But I have there's some fun street art I've seen of a seagull still on a chip. So yeah, the seagulls are certainly a big part of the culture here and I think they're so fun. They're, you know, they're such little menaces.

Michaela [00:46:24] Yeah. That's one way to describe them. They are a bit scary if you come from like I come from a country which is landlocked and our sea gulls, well they're river gulls I guess there's no sea, but they're way, way smaller than these monsters are in here.

Jack [00:46:41] I mean, same thing in Los Angeles. They're much smaller. They're very big here.

Michaela [00:46:45] the whisky powers them, and the Irn Bru. Frances, how do other international students from other parts of the world, how do they react to Aberdeen?

Frances [00:46:58] The thing that is always really good to hear and to be aware of is that there is very, very clean air in Aberdeen. Some people are maybe moving from countries or really huge cities where there's high pollution, there's maybe smog and you do not get that in Scotland and you've got loads of green space, you've got loads of sea side around pretty much any of the major cities, you really don't have to travel very far. So it's a very fresh, clean and sort of environment that you live in, which is really nice, and you also don't have long commutes. So a lot of students that I speak to in China or Hong Kong have to commute an hour to go to a university nearby because it's such a vast country. And that would be the same for students from other areas of the world as well. You can walk across Aberdeen very easily. I think it's just to be able to do that and have that sort of lifestyle of the city life, you've got the hustle and bustle of cafes, restaurants, bars, cinemas, bowling alleys. You've got everything you expect a city to have. But then you're also totally surrounded by the countryside. So if you like to go out in your spare time and do a hill walking or mountain biking or going work at like hundreds of castles that are within a stone's throw of Aberdeen, you can do that really easily. And then, as Jack mentioned just there about the beach, that's what may be about a 10 minute walk from the campus itself. If that.

Jack [00:48:35] if that, I would say less. But yeah.

Frances [00:48:38] Yeah. And to be able to just finish a class or maybe a break between your classes and it's a glorious day and just be able to walk down to the beach and go and you can walk through pretty much the full length of the city and you can walk right along the beach front. And there's the things like the sort of traditional beach boulevard that you might have seen. So there's like a Ferris wheel, there's arcades, there's cafes and ice cream shops. And but then you do see people out there who will be going sort of like swimming in the sea. They'll be doing surfing, body boarding water and lots of different

water activities going on. So you've got all of that within the start of life in Aberdeen, essentially, which is just a really, really nice to see. And no matter what sort of life. So you want to have a being a student, you can do any of them really.

Michaela [00:49:25] And I also found that the city's quite international. It's probably because of the historic links with other big oil and gas countries and cities. But it's very international. So, you know, don't worry about like coming to this country or the city where literally no one has ever seen a foreigner. That happened to me when I lived in Alabama. No one literally had seen a foreigner before. So I was a big attraction. I am not a big attraction here because there's so many international students and so many people from different cultures, different religions, different skin colours and everything. So it's a really nice cosmopolitan place. And it feels a little bit weird saying that about a city of two hundred thousand people. But I think it's really nice. It's really mixed. You will meet people from all over the world, but also you will run into people, you know, all the time when you're in the city centre. I worked in a little convenience store in the city centre. The amount of people I would run into that I knew from somewhere was huge. And if I went for drinks in the afternoon or in the early afternoon, you know, after a rough lecture, I would you would run into people, you know, and you would speak to people that you meet for the first time and then realise you see them everywhere. So it's really nice. But also it actually is quite a big city. So there is a variety of different things, like there's a vegan cafe, you know, vegetarian, zero waste cafe, that sort of stuff. Like there's still like subsections of society, even within this sort of sort of tight knit community. So I really like that.

Frances [00:51:09] I hear that from students as well. It's like it's obviously a big change moving to university, never mind when it's halfway across the world. And if you do have home comforts, we've got loads and loads of different types of supermarkets from around the world. So we've got a pretty much everything you can think of in terms of like supermarkets, restaurants. So there's loads that you can sort of go and have those nice home comforts. If you just think I'd quite like to make a dish that my mum would make when I'd be at home. And you can go and buy those, like, for example, from the university, there's a couple of international supermarkets, maybe five, ten minutes walk away and you can just go and buy food to make those sort of home comfort foods. And obviously I'm going to be very biased because I am Scottish. But I do think in general, Scotland is a very, very welcoming country and people will just want to know everything about you. So be prepared to talk. And we do like to have a conversation or a blether, as we would say so. And you will find that people are really friendly, really welcoming. And as Michaela mentioned there before about the sort of history of the oil and gas in Aberdeen, it's brought people from all over the world who have now settled in Aberdeen. So that's why we have such a diverse mix within the sort of just general community within the city, but also within the university. And also teaching staff is where academics have come over to teach at the university because of its sort of rich heritage and the sort of research work that's carried out here. So as well as the student body, the staff is very international as well, which is really nice because it's just it's so nice. Being able to talk to people and meet people from all over the world, I think is one of the best things about doing this job, I would say, is getting to meet people from all over.

Michaela [00:52:54] Have you done any ceilidh, Jack?

Jack [00:52:58] no, I haven't. I saw that the LGBTQ forum was doing it, but I never went. I never muster the courage, but I am really wanted to go to one. And when they put one on, I think I'll probably be going to that one. But I have not yet.

Frances [00:53:16] Great fun. You get sore feet, but they're great fun.

Michaela [00:53:20] And I think that's where the welcoming spirit really comes through properly because you get you'll get dragged in and you are dancing actually, even if you have absolutely no idea what to do. So that is definitely something. Also, we have Robbie Burns night in late January where you eat your haggis and your tatties and neeps, which is, you know, potatoes and what is a neep in English?

Frances [00:53:47] Turnip.

Jack [00:53:47] We had a proper Robbie Burns night this season. We got a vegetarian haggis that was quite good. And then my flatmate, who's from Dundee, he recited the Robert Burns poem. I'm sure you're familiar with it. I forget which one and what it's called, though, but yeah. So it is quite fun. And there's usually fireworks as well and things like that. So that's nice.

Michaela [00:54:12] Yeah. So if you do want to immerse yourself in the Scottish culture, you know, there's definitely going to be opportunities for that. And Scottish people love talking about Scotland and Scottishness and everything Scottish. So you definitely will have the opportunity to do that. But don't worry, it's not the only thing that you can do. It's not it's not a crash course in Scottishness. You can also find out about other things and do other stuff. And is there any parting words that you guys would like to share with our listeners?

Jack [00:54:43] Um, yeah, I suppose I would say that coming to the University of Aberdeen, I consider to be one of my most influential and one of my best choices I ever made. And I never have a moment where I'm like, oh, what if I had gone elsewhere? What if I had done this instead? Genuinely, I never have a moment of doubt that I did the right thing. And it's difficult for me to imagine what my life would be if I hadn't ever, not only moved to the University of Aberdeen, moved to Aberdeen, but I'd never come to Scotland because I really feel so welcomed into the community here. And I really feel a part of, you know, sort of the culture. And I feel very accepted. So really, especially to the American listeners, I have the shared experience. But also to anyone else, I would really recommend giving a Scotland a good whack, as it were, and the University of Aberdeen especially. I feel very much at home.

Michaela [00:55:48] It's great to hear. Is there anything you would like to say, Frances, before we wrap it up?

Frances [00:55:54] We've obviously covered quite a lot in this, but we've got such a rich heritage for education in Scotland and it really goes to show because within Scotland we have correct me if I'm wrong, Michaela, is it seventeen higher education institutions and for the country that's what about five million people. I think that that's amazing to, to see that we've got so many universities or colleges that students can come to. So and just keep that in mind. Scotland is a really good location for people to come and do their time at university and choose a degree and sort of follow through with their studies. And obviously Aberdeen I do think it's a really, really great location. You've kind of got everything that you could want from a city, but you've got countryside and sea side and it's a really, really nice place like what you mentioned earlier about and it's not too big that you're thinking, oh I'm not going to have time to do everything if I was at university. It's just big enough that you've got plenty to fill your free time, but still feel that you're at home and you're comfortable and you're safe then. And because it's a really, really sort of lovely

environment and it doesn't feel like a massive city where you're going to be lost. Erm and even within the university we're sort classified as a medium sized university, so about fourteen and a half thousand students. And for me I think that's really good for students because you're not going to be sort of left in the background or lost in the crowd. Like if you need any support, if you need help and strength and or just someone to talk to, like you will be heard because the universities, that sort of nice size where you've got plenty of sort of opportunities and the staff to sort of student ratio is really good as well. And so it's a nice sized university to feel part of the community, but not certainly lost in the crowd, I would probably say.

Michaela [00:57:49] I hope that we have now convinced you to absolutely come to Aberdeen or at least, you know, at least apply. We will try to convince you once you apply as well, but I hope that you have found this episode helpful. Jack, obviously sharing his firsthand experience is hugely, hugely helpful for us all to hear it from the mouths of babes. You know, I think that's a saying anyway. So thank you so much for joining us, Jack, and also Frances, for sharing your world view with us from hearing from other students, from other parts of the world. And please do e-mail us with any questions or if you have any suggestions about what we should cover next. We will include a link in the show notes to how to contact our international officers or how to contact our current students as well through the aforementioned UniBuddy platform. So you can chat to other international students one to one as well. And please do join us again next week. Next week, it will be Georgie who will be speaking to two science students who will be talking about what it's like to study science and what do they do day to day, what to expect from that. So please do join us next week again. And I hope you find this helpful. Thank you.

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