



“Coming here has set me up for the rest of my career”

Brazil's swift rise from developing country to global energy power has sent reverberations around the international oil industry. But whilst the country rejoiced at its rapidly growing energy market, the government recognised a huge domestic skills shortage that needed to be addressed in order to meet requirements.

Its response was to launch Science Without Borders – a program designed to kickstart Brazil's skills base in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects – a scheme which has already seen Brazilian students undertake their studies in Aberdeen.

As part of the program, up to 100,000 Brazilian students (many PhD level) will be sent to study overseas.

Following an appeal by the Brazilian government for industry financial support, BG Group, a UK company active in Brazil, announced its intentions to support 450 Brazilian PhDs abroad.

The University of Aberdeen took up the challenge and as part of a partnership with the Brazilian Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS) to train Brazilian PhDs in geoscience.

Twenty PhD students will enrol at the University's Department of Geology and Petroleum Geology over the next six years.

The first PhD students arrived in Aberdeen in October last year. Two of them, sedimentologist Guilherme Bozetti and geochemist Julia Neri Gezatt from Porto Alegre in South Brazil described their early experiences of the Granite City.

“My first impressions of Aberdeen were through Wikipedia,” admits Julia. “The city is really grey because of all the granite buildings but I really like it. The people are very warm compared to other places I've been in the UK. They're very inviting, energetic and positive.

“We're here because although everything is starting to work in Brazil, in terms of the industry, there aren't enough geologists to take on all the work in Brazil. But everything's growing and with the help of programmes like this I think in no time it will be up to speed.

“Of course I knew Aberdeen was the energy capital of Europe but it wasn't until I arrived here that I quickly realised just how big the industry is here. Everywhere you go there is a sign for an oil, energy or gas firm. Many of the researchers here, regardless of

their discipline, are working in some capacity that is related to, or could be beneficial to the energy industry.”

Guilherme's work is based on the importance of deep water channels and turbidites offshore Brazil.

“The reason I wanted to come to Aberdeen was because of the names of the supervisors – Ben Kneller and Ian Alsopp. In Brazil, most of the oil we're getting out of the ground is related to turbidites and Ben is one of the biggest names in the world in that field. He's actually known as 'the Turbidite Guy'. That was attractive to me because I knew I'd be learning a lot about a subject that is very important in Brazil. Now, if you are in the oil industry and you know quite a lot about seismic interpretation – it puts you a big step ahead.

“Aberdeen is the main city when it comes to oil and gas so it's the best place to be for getting in touch with industry. Last week I was at Schlumberger for a full week doing software training. You lead a life living in the industry and you get to know the companies.

“It's more multicultural than I thought it would be. Some companies have a large percentage of staff from the countries that they are operating in.

At the University too, people have come from all over the world. In my class there are people from Vietnam, Mexico, Iraq, and someone from Aberdeen.

Julia says she's also been impressed by the University's facilities.

“The University is fantastic. Everything you need, anything you can imagine, there's always someone who can help you put it into practice, always someone you can ask for help – the infrastructure is in place to allow that to happen.”

Guilherme added: “I didn't realise there'd be as much opportunity for travelling. I've been on fieldwork expeditions to Chile and Turkey – and soon to Mexico.”

Whilst both have been impressed by the University's facilities and staff, being from Brazil, understandably adjusting to the weather has taken some time.

“You need to understand there are two different Aberdeens,” Guilherme explained. “There's winter time Aberdeen and summertime Aberdeen. Wintertime Aberdeen is a good time to work! You can just lock yourself away and get so much done. You arrive at 9am and it's still dark, you get a bit of light during the day and then about 3.30pm, it starts to get dark again.

“But on the other hand, you get summertime Aberdeen and that is amazing – really nice weather! It's hot but not too hot, you still get a breeze which is nice. And you get daylight almost all day. What's most surprising is you live by the beach but you never get into the water. I've not been in yet but I might try!

“Most importantly though, coming here has set me up for the rest of my career. I'd definitely recommend it.” □

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