

Baden-Württemberg Stipendium Personal Report

Name: Scott Backhouse

Email: scott.backhouse7@gmail.com

Home University: RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia

Host University: Hochschule Karlsruhe Technik und Wirtschaft, Karlsruhe, Germany

Duration of stay: 14th November 2013 - 18th April 2014

Submission Date: 20th August 2014

- ✓ I agree to the publication of my personal report on the websites of the *Baden-Württemberg-STIPENDIUM* www.bw-stipendium.de and the Baden-Württemberg Stiftung www.bw-stiftung.de

1 – Synopsis

For the duration of my stay in Karlsruhe, Germany from November 2013 until April 2014 I participated in the Study Centre for Optofluidics and Nanophotonics (SCON) program which consists of a team of researchers at Hochschule Karlsruhe under the supervision of Professor Christian Karnutsch. At the core of the SCON program is a student exchange between Hochschule Karlsruhe and RMIT University in Melbourne, Australia with the RMIT University part of the program being supervised by Professor Arnan Mitchell.

My expectations of what studying abroad would be like were consistently exceeded. My time in Germany was a tremendous learning experience as it was my first time in a country outside of Australia. The challenge of communicating with people in everyday life in a language I did not speak was difficult but rewarding. My time spent abroad was some of the best times of my life and if possible I would like to participate in another study exchange.

In my limited dealings with the Baden-Württemberg Stipendium I found the people to be very easy to communicate with and happy to help so the entire process was very smooth and easy.

2 – Preparations Prior to Departure

Before heading to Germany there were numerous things to sort out such as health and travel insurance, passport and visa applications, accommodation and research into opening a foreign bank account in Germany. As this is the second time the SCON exchange program had been run there was help available from the previous students who participated and so this made the process much easier as I knew clearly what had to be done. The main priorities were health insurance, passport and booking flights. The visa was not much of a problem as that can be applied for and completed after landing in Germany. It is not necessary to have a visa before arriving in Germany.

Much of my application process at my host institution Hochschule Karlsruhe was handled by the Hochschule's international office, in particular Mr Hannes Schwarz and Ms Angelika Günter-Warth as well as my supervisor Professor Christian Karnutsch and the German participating students of the SCON exchange program. As a result much of the application process was completed quickly and easily. Professor Arnan Mitchell of RMIT University was also a great help for ensuring everything was organised before departing Australia. So with all the help available my enrolment was practically complete before I had departed Australia.

3 – Studying in the Host Country

As I was undertaking a research project at Hochschule Karlsruhe I was not enrolled into any courses or subjects. Due to this I am not able to comment on the procedure to enrol in subjects and the standard of the courses. However I did come into contact with numerous teaching professors when I required help on specific parts of my project and their knowledge of their particular fields was clearly evident and also they were very approachable and willing to help. The resources available at the university were also very easy to access and any problems were sorted quickly.

The international office regularly ran events and leisure activities throughout the semester for international students to meet and experience German culture. I participated in a day trip to Heidelberg where a tour of the city was given as well as a funicular (cable car) ride up to the historic castle with a tour of the castle and the Christmas market. The tour was very informative and was

organised well by the international office so everything was very easy. Other events included trips to museums in Stuttgart and other areas as well as a day trip to Feldberg to ski.

Overall Hochschule Karlsruhe provided excellent support to international students in my experience. If there were any problems it was easy to talk to somebody and have the issue resolved quickly. I believe the university is a great choice for international students.

4 – Stay in the Host Country

I found Germany to be a wonderful country. The cultural diversity between different areas of the country was quite astounding and to me was unexpected. I travelled quite extensively throughout Germany as well as neighbouring countries such as France, Luxembourg, Belgium, Switzerland, Austria and Czech Republic and found the German people to be the most approachable and willing to help in general. As I was in Germany primarily through the winter months it was surprising to see that every town, village and city was always full of people with events always happening. The Christmas markets throughout the country were a particular highlight.

During my time in Germany I lived in a Wohnheim in close proximity to the university that mostly consisted of German students. Due to this I got to interact extensively with German people to see how they lived and experience many aspects of the day to life. I feel that this was the best way to experience Germany as not only was I seeing the cities, towns and countryside but I was able to live with and form friendships with many German people and participate in cultural activities and celebrations such as the aforementioned Christmas markets, Silvester and Carnival.

5 - Baden-Württemberg Stipendium Network

The group of students participating in the SCON exchange (3 Australians and 3 Germans) attended the annual BWS event that was held in Ludwigsburg on November 29th 2013. At this event we were able to interact with many other scholarship holders to learn and share experiences with. There were a number of German students who were travelling to Australia and so we were able to help them with organising some parts of their trip as well as give them locations and places to visit when in Australia. So to this end we were able to help students coming to or from Australia and I would be happy to help future students if they wanted or needed help.

I also conducted an interview about my time in Germany and the SCON program with a journalist from the Baden-Württemberg Stipendium that was to be published in the annual magazine/ newsletter and so hopefully that can help future students to understand and decide if an exchange is right for them.

6 – Handy Tips for Future Participants

For any future participants of the Baden-Württemberg Stipendium that are attending universities in Germany I recommend the following:

- If possible try to live in accommodation with Germans as that will be the best way to experience the lifestyle
- When sorting out forms for registering your address, setting up a bank account or applying for visas if possible have somebody who is fluent in German accompany you as there is not

always an employee available who can speak English and so the process is much easier with someone to help.

- Attend as many of the host universities organised events and activities as possible. They are a great way to meet new people and experience new things.

Some helpful links I found throughout my stay:

Hochschule Karlsruhe International Office	http://www.hs-karlsruhe.de/en/io.html At this link is a lot of useful information about living in Karlsruhe and application process for HsKA.
Karlsruhe Auslanderbehörde (Visa Office)	http://www.karlsruhe.de/b4/buergerdienste/oa/ala.de Here you can book appointments to apply for a visa. Please be aware that the website only seems to work properly in German for visa applications.
Phone Companies	http://www.telekom.de/ http://www.o2online.de/ These are two of the biggest phone providers and make it quite easy to get a sim card for your phone,
Banks	https://www.deutsche-bank.de/index.htm http://www.sparkasse.de/ These are two of the larger bank companies in Germany. From personal experience it was much easier to set up an account with Deutsche Bank,

7 – Other

I would like to extend my thanks to the Baden-Württemberg Stipendium for accepting me for a scholarship and making this exchange possible. I would also like to thank everybody at Hochschule Karlsruhe, especially the international office for making all of the applications and processes very easy during my stay. Overall the exchange was fantastic and any future participants are welcome to contact me if they have any further questions.