

Herman Aguirre, UK

Herman is from Chile and is a PhD student at the Camborne School of Mines, working on the use of programming languages, producing advanced analysis with data collected by sensing mining and minerals systems designed and developed at the University of Exeter.

How long does it take to complete a PhD degree in the UK?

It takes 3 years to complete a PhD degree.

How did you get involved in this area of study/research?

I'm a mining engineer with more than 10 years' experience and wanted to develop skills in technology to apply new approaches to the mining industry. That's why I also came to the UK.

Tell us about the process of applying for a PhD degree

The process was a little bit complicated because there are only a few mining departments around the world. I wanted to come to Europe to develop my skills, bearing in mind that the best options were in Australia, USA or Canada (advanced mining industry). However, Camborne School of Mines is a very prestigious mining department. The application process comprised of interviews and English tests. Those steps were not very long, but very high level.

What were the factors contributing to the choice of university?

The prestige of Camborne School of Mines. More than 100 years of teaching mining generations.

How are PhD degrees funded in the UK and how are you doing so?

The PhD that I'm studying is funded by the University of Exeter (tuition fees and stipend).

What challenges/surprises/opportunities have you experienced along the way?

There are many challenges. Moving to a country and speaking another language is tough. You can perform quite well in exams, but real life is rather different. It was complicated to understand everyday life in the UK, and it took me more than 2 years to feel comfortable.

Regarding surprises, the UK is an amazing country - traditions, history, cultural life is brilliant.

About opportunities, I realised that there are many grants to spin my PhD out. I think I can use the UK platform to launch my own company alongside my supervisors.

How do you manage work/life balance while studying?

Fortunately, I have the budget to cover my expenses.

Were your expectations met?

Absolutely! To live in the UK and study at an advanced and developed nation has been impactful.

What are the admission requirements (visa, funding, etc.)

Good level of English (which is the most important factor), a Tier 4 Visa, secured funding and expertise (you need to demonstrate high level of expertise and luckily my industry experience helped during the interview process).

Why did you choose to study outside your country?

Leaving your one's country is probably one of the biggest challenges that a modern person can face. You leave absolutely everything behind you, not just money or your comfort zone, but family and friends. Also, cultural differences. As a Latin-American person, we are used to hugging, smiling at each other in the streets even when you do not know people around. In the UK, or at least in London, nobody speaks to each other, and groups of people are



quite complicated to penetrate. I'm not criticising and only just saying that for us that is complicated and sometimes questions the reasons for leaving your country, but it is a demonstration of how strong you are.

Another important reason is knowledge. If you want to access to cutting-edge technologies, you have no other choice than to leave your country.

What kind of support would an international student need (social, professional, community, language, mentorship, etc.)?

I do not think we need support.