

You have three weeks to teach us the English way!

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A GROUP of German university graduates has invaded Worcester businesses on a quest for intercultural experience – and your reporter is one of them.

The eight graduates from Mainz are taking part in an international work experience programme funded by the German government and the EU.

For two months, they will be working as interns in a variety of establishments, aiming to improve their English and discovering a different work environment, hoping to raise their chances in the job market in the process.

Germany may have made it through the financial crisis with a black eye, but job prospects for inexperienced graduates are still looking rather bleak.

When asked about their expectations, the young Germans – most of whom have visited other parts of Britain before – all agree about wanting to improve their language skills and getting a better understanding of British culture.

Christian Heger, who has recently finished his PhD in film studies, said: "In today's job market, having international work experience is absolutely essential."

Some graduates have come here with very specific goals in mind.

Julia Linz, a political sciences graduate, has secured a placement at the Concern Universal charity in Hereford and is looking to improve her fund-raising skills.

She said: "Charities and fund-raising is a field where the UK is very much ahead of Germany.

"I hope to learn from the advanced charity culture here and to transfer the skills I acquire to fund-raising back home."

Stefanie Steinheimer, an economics graduate, appreciates the polite communication and the positive atmosphere at her workplace, the Chamber of Commerce for Worcestershire and Herefordshire.

Comparing it to a typical German working environment, she said: "In Germany, everyone is more direct, which can often have a negative impact on the atmosphere."

Local businesses are also profiting from taking on the graduates. The chamber has taken on several graduates and appreciates the opportunity to get to know a foreign work culture.

Kelly Betts, marketing manager, values the extra pairs of hands. She said: "The German students are hard-working and enthusiastic."

The chamber also helps to bring local businesses and graduates together, tailoring each placement in a way where both parties will benefit from it.

But even for the diligent Germans, it's not all work all of the time – an activity programme including excursions to Birmingham, Oxford and London has been devised by the programme's local co-ordinator Peter Corbishley, who runs a language school in Pershore.

Mr Corbishley took the group to their first ever rugby game. Despite [Worcester Warriors](#) losing, the sport was met with enthusiasm.

Upon learning that Mainz has its very own rugby team, Ms Steinheimer said: "I will definitely be attending a game when we get back home. I have a number of friends who have the perfect build to be rugby players. I want to see them take up the sport!"

The graduates have also had plenty of opportunities to explore Worcester and the surrounding areas – and they have taken a liking to the region.

Natalie Chirchetti, aged 19, is the youngest in the group, having finished her A-levels this summer.

She said: "The Midlands is very beautiful. I love the county of Worcestershire. The houses are very cute and [Worcester Cathedral](#) is very impressive."

The group has also been very impressed with the warm welcome they have received from their host families. Ms Steinheimer said: "I find it remarkable that so many families are open to sharing their houses and their lives with a complete stranger, because that always means giving up a bit of private life as well."

But the visitors from continental Europe also noticed some peculiar differences in everyday life.

Ms Chirchetti observed: "The wall sockets have on/off switches, and the ceiling pullcords take some getting used to! The food is also very different, but tasty."

Some are fighting with the pitfalls of English plumbing such as separate taps for hot and cold water, complicated showers, or toilet flush operation.

"You need to apply a very precise, balanced pressure for it to work," said Ms Steinheimer.

Dr Heger comes up with a whole list of subtle and not-so-subtle differences between England and Germany: "Tea drinking is omnipresent at all times, though it won't be served to you by a waiter like it would in any given German café or pub.

"Round buying simply isn't done in Germany, either – we like to split our bills as neatly as possible, though you might come across the occasional exception.

"You wouldn't catch a German saying goodbye to or thanking the bus driver, even though the buses are more likely to be punctual than in England."

Truly, we must seem a heartless, uncivilised and relentless people to you. Bear with us – you have three weeks to teach us the proper English way of doing things.

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