This summer, I had an amazing six-week internship at the Centre for Experimental Research on Fairness, Inequality and Rationality (FAIR), a leading behavioural economics research group in Europe. For the main part of my internship, I worked on a project on social exclusion and fairness under the supervision of Dr. Hallgeir Sjastad, who is an experimental psychologist at FAIR.
I started off my internship with a four-day introduction course to behavioural economics, which is organised by FAIR every summer. This year, FAIR invited one of the leading researchers in the field of behavioural economics, Professor George Lowenstein from Carnegie Mellon University, to be the lecturer. Over the course of four days, Prof. Lowenstein talked about a range of topics in behavioural economics, from policy to belief-based utility, and introduced us to many of his work. I was amazed by the scope of his research, and also learned a lot as a psychology student with no background in economics.

I spent the remaining five weeks working on the research project with Hallgeir and Andreas, who is another student from Oxford. We already had some discussions about the project before I came to FAIR, and we were interested in investigating the relationship between social exclusion and people’s perception of fairness. Research has shown that being exposed to unfairness can make people feel socially excluded, but no one has examined the
relationship the other way around - whether social exclusion can influence fairness perception. If this is proved to be true, then findings from our project could provide insight into issues caused by inequality in socially excluded groups.

We had to overcome some challenges during the project, especially in terms of experimental design. Because FAIR, as a research centre for behavioural economics, does not allow the use of deception in experiments, we had to look for a social exclusion paradigm that did not involve deception in our project. We also decided to run the study online so that we would be able to collect data from enough participants in a short time. This was a completely new experience for me, as I had never run an original research project before. A lot of my time was spent in the office doing background research in order to decide on the most appropriate study design, creating the surveys to be used, and analysing participants’ data.

Three weeks into the project, we ran a pilot study to test the effectiveness of our social exclusion paradigms, as well as to have an initial examination of our hypothesis. The pilot was a short survey with two phases: participants first underwent a social exclusion manipulation, and then answered a series of questions based on a hypothetical scenario involving an unfair economic distribution. We got some encouraging results from the pilot: our manipulation was proved effective, and participants who felt socially excluded through our manipulation also reacted more strongly in the hypothetical scenario where they were treated unfairly.

Results from the pilot gave us a lot of confidence, and we then ran a follow-up study to validate the findings, this time pre-registering our hypotheses and recruiting a greater number of participants. Currently we are still in the process of data analysis, but so far the results look very positive. I will continue to work on the project with Hallgeir and Andreas while I’m in Oxford. After the project is finished, we aim to write it up and publish our findings in a psychology journal.

As a visiting researcher, I was involved in many activities at FAIR. For example, we had weekly seminars with guest speakers from other institutions talking about their research. We also had many internal meetings and presentations. Through these events, I was greatly inspired by other people’s work, and I also got some great project ideas from other researchers at FAIR. I also had the chance to explore Bergen during my internship; for example, I participated in one of the organised hikes on Mount Stoltzen.
(The hike I mentioned in the previous paragraph)
I learned a great deal from my internship at FAIR this summer, from conducting my own research and from communicating with fellow researchers at FAIR. I’m extremely grateful for the experience and would like to thank the Rokos scholarship for making the this possible.