

Lausanne 2016



Why I chose the European Studies Programme

When I put Manchester down as one of my university choices, I didn't actually know that this programme existed, so it was a pleasant surprise when I found out that this opportunity was available to me. My family moved house a lot when I was younger and we spent almost 4 years living in France when I was aged 5-9 years, during which time I was fortunate to have learnt French. So I chose European Studies mainly because I enjoy the language and did not want to forget it, and the 4 month placement would be a great opportunity to experience living and working in another part of Europe. I am quite open minded about where I might end up living in the future, and this seemed like one way of exploring my options.

I chose Lausanne because having already lived in France (albeit when I was very young), I wanted to experience living in another (partly)-Francophone country. I am pretty enthusiastic about the outdoors and as you'll know Switzerland is a fantastic country for this (skiing, hiking, climbing etc...) The fact that you can do a StEP for 1 month at the beginning of 5th Year (which I did) is also a great thing, so you still have the opportunity to spend some time outside of Europe if you feel like it.

Living in Lausanne

Lausanne is a small, vibrant and very hilly city on the edge of Lac Léman, which is the largest lake in Europe. Despite its small size, there is an incredible amount going on here and a huge student

population, so there is always something to do. It is always extremely easy to visit other parts of Switzerland because the trains go everywhere, and you can even get to the nearest ski station in just over 1 hour.

Every weekend there seemed to be something going on in this city, and when the weather was good it was nice to go down to the lakeside to sit, walk or have a BBQ. From the lakeside in Lausanne, there is a stunning view of the mountains in France and Valais, which I never got tired of looking at. I went to a few museums in Lausanne on rainy days and my favourite was Musée de l'Art Brut, which featured some incredibly original and interesting artwork created by people on the fringes of society, such as prisoners and people with psychiatric illnesses. I also recommend the Olympic Museum in Ouchy.



The university has an exchange student society (ESN UNIL) which organises loads of parties and trips including snow-shoeing, hiking, skiing, cultural visits and a huge annual boat party out on the lake, called 'Titanique Lémanique' which was at the end of my time in Lausanne and absolutely fantastic.

Lausanne has a varied nightlife with plenty of decent bars, such as ever-popular 'Great Escape', as well as 'Bleu Lezard', 'Café St Pierre' and 'Etoile Blanche'. ESN organise a fair few parties as well, and the medical students society also organise a 'Bal de Médecine' which was quite fun. An event which I really enjoyed was the Jazz Festival in a nearby town Cully, where you could wander around into various pubs and 'caves de vin' where lots of different Jazz bands were playing.



View from Leysin ski station

Being able to go skiing and visit the mountains was a huge draw for me to Lausanne. The nearest area is Alpes Vaudoises (Leysin, Diablerets), which are easily accessible by train. We also went to Verbier towards the end of the season because it is higher up and the snow stays around for longer. If you want to go skiing I recommend looking on the "Snow 'n' Rail" offers on the SBB website, as you can get combined train tickets and ski passes at a slight discount.

If you think you're going to do a lot of skiing, it might be worth looking

at getting some second-hand skis. A friend bought some on anibis.ch, which seems like an eBay equivalent, for around 50 CHF all in which is about the same as hiring it for a day, so could save you a lot of cash!

When spring arrives and the snow starts to melt, Switzerland has an unbelievable choice of beautiful hikes that you can do. I wish I had more time to be able to do more of these. The routes are always well signposted and I used this website (<http://www.myswitzerland.com/en-ch/interests/hiking1.html>) when deciding where to go and what route to take. Similarly there are loads of different cycling routes in the surrounding area, and if you're feeling up to it, a full tour of the lake is 180 km and can easily be done in 2 days.

If that isn't already enough physical exercise, the university has a huge range of sports clubs so whatever you want to do, there will be a club for it here. Some of the classes you have to pay for and others are free as long as you show your student card. I actually joined Stade Lausanne hockey team for a while which was fun. It was a non-university team with a lot of international expats working in Geneva and Lausanne.

Differences in medical practice between the UK and in Switzerland

I was interested to find out how the healthcare system works in Switzerland and what the differences were with our NHS. The healthcare system is insurance based, and all residents have to pay a minimum of 400 CHF per month, and the first 2000 CHF of healthcare costs before the insurance company starts paying. I found this pretty shocking, but the Swiss people didn't seem to mind how expensive it was. I asked what happened if someone could not afford to pay their health insurance, and apparently in these cases the state covers the costs.

Some patients were "privé" or "demi-privé" and paid a higher premium which covered additional, non-essential treatment, a private side-room if one was available, and they were seen by the senior doctor more regularly than the other patients. This division between private and non-private patients was strange to me, and felt uncomfortable when private patients occasionally made demands for a private room etc. Having said that, all patients regardless of their health insurance ultimately received a very high standard of care. I didn't notice any significant differences in terms of the way in which medicine was practiced in the UK.

In the Swiss system, the 'médecin assistant' is the equivalent of a junior doctor in the UK. After several years of training they become 'chef de clinique' and above them you have the 'médecin cadre'. The medicine course is 6 years in Switzerland, so the placements I did were the ones that 6th year 'stagiaires' were also doing. Newly qualified doctors go directly into specialty training, although depending on what specialty you choose you may need a year of experience in general medicine or general surgery. Junior doctors work very long hours and (like in the UK) have loads of paperwork to do, but from what I was told they are fairly well paid.

Placements

The CHUV (Centre Hospitalier Universitaire Vaudois) is the main teaching hospital in the region, and is huge. It has an excellent reputation and staff working there from many different nationalities. The working days were longer than what I was used to in the UK, for all placements that I did in Lausanne. As a result I feel like I learnt a huge amount during my time there and gained some really good clinical experience. It also motivated me to make the most of my weekends and days off to go and enjoy everything that Switzerland has to offer. In addition, stagiaires are generally allowed to take 2 days of holiday per month which we could choose ourselves, so this freed up some more time for exploring. Some departments are a bit funny about this, so it does depend where you go (obs &

gynae, neonatology and internal medicine for example do not give holiday) but from my experience it was usually not a problem.

At the CHUV, you can eat at the cafeteria where the menu of the day costed 8.30 CHF for a soup and a main course, although there is a lot of choice. There is bread everywhere throughout the hospital (wards, theatre coffee room, cafeteria) and this is free so you can help yourself. Also in the mornings, you can get breakfast at the main cafeteria, and the tea from the machines is also free there.

Dermatology

I chose dermatology because previous reports that it was good, and I didn't feel like I had had much exposure to the speciality yet. Overall it was an enjoyable, relaxed placement that I would definitely recommend to other students.

I spent one week in the ambulatory clinic (polyclinique), one week in the urgent clinic (urgences), one week on the ward (l'étage) and for the last week I was able to choose. In the 'polyclinique', I sat in with the doctors seeing new patients and follow-ups with a range of dermatological complaints. 'Urgences' was a little more interesting because we were expected to start the consultations alone, take the full history and write in the notes. The doctor would come in once this was done, I would present the case they would then take over the consultation. 'Urgences' dealt with patients who needed more prompt treatment. Anyone who wanted a consultation straightaway could present and be seen in a quick triage by the doctor, who would decide whether their condition actually warranted an urgent consultation. These were rarely life-threatening situations, but things such as a severe flare-up of psoriasis, eczema, a suspicious lesion, or scabies were accepted as urgent cases.

There was only one médecin assistante who looked after the hospitalised patients in dermatology, and I worked with her during my time on the ward. I would attend the daily ward rounds and note down what was said for each patient during these, and then write these up for the handover document later in the day. My other activities were to assist with admissions, order tests, make phone calls and discuss treatments with patients. It wasn't a stressful environment and sometimes it could be very quiet, but it was useful to learn how chronic wounds, bullous pemphigoid and other more serious conditions are managed. Days in the clinic started at 08:00 and 08:45 on the ward, and usually finished around 17:00. Every day there was also a "colloque" at 13:30, where the doctors took it in turns to present interesting cases they had seen.

A major benefit of this placement for me was learning how to do biopsies. I had managed to make it through medical so far with hardly any knowledge or experience in suturing, and this was the perfect way to start practising the skill in a supportive environment. First the doctors showed me how to do them and supervised me a couple of times whilst I got the hang of it. After this I did a lot of them alone and my confidence with the skill improved a lot as a result. I also got to do some cryotherapy treatment which was fun. At the end of the placement the stagiaires were required to present a dermatological topic to the rest of the department, in a presentation that lasted around 10 minutes. This was good experience and helped my confidence speaking French after my first month there.

Obstetrics

Having done my obs & gynae block at Salford Royal where there is no labour ward, I felt like I was lacking in experience in obstetrics, a specialty which I am quite interested in. For this placement, the

days begin at 07:30 every day. This sounds ridiculously early but I got used to it pretty quickly, and when you only live 10 minutes' walk from the hospital it's not too bad.

Half of the placement is spent on the pre-natal ward. On this unit, patients with various complications of pregnancy were managed, and sometimes kept right up until they give birth. There were a lot of women at risk of premature labour, some with poly- and oligo-hydramnios, substance abuse and other antenatal problems. There was one médecin assistant responsible for around 20 patients so needless to say he was very busy, but mostly with paperwork, which meant that often there was very little to do here. On a typical day after the 'colloque' at 07:30, there would be a ward round (la visite) and a meeting with the midwives (contre-visite) which would take up most of the morning. In the afternoon, there were usually a couple of ultrasound scans to assess fetal wellbeing, some swabs to test for infections or premature rupture of membranes, and PV ultrasound scans to assess the length of the cervix. The doctor showed me how to use the ultrasound machine and calculate a score of fetal wellbeing, so I was able to practice doing this myself. There were also opportunities to practice the speculum examination and perform swabs, but this wasn't offered to me so I had to ask.

The 2 weeks spent on the labour ward was a lot busier with much more going on. Here there would be one médecin assistant and one chef de clinique looking after these women. There was no midwife led unit here, so all labours were overseen to a greater or lesser degree by a doctor in case there were any problems. During this time I saw many births, ranging from uncomplicated to instrumental deliveries, and elective and emergency c-sections. As a stagiaire, I was expected to scrub in for every c-section and assist in a small way (holding instruments, suctioning, cauterising and sometimes I was able to do some sutures).

As mentioned the supervisor does not grant stagiaires their 2 days of holiday unless they work a weekend during the placement, which is spent on the labour ward. I didn't mind this too much because the placement fell over Easter so there were two bank holidays anyway, but it is worth being aware of if you choose this placement. Overall I would recommend it, the staff were friendly and I felt like I learnt a lot during my time there.

Neurosurgery

I wasn't really looking forward to this placement as I am more interested in neurology than neurosurgery and I had heard from a few other medical students that they had not enjoyed their placements there. What I noticed when I arrived was that there was no structure to the placement at all. Stagiaires are left entirely to their own devices and are not given any jobs to do. I found this pretty difficult and disorientating in the first week, as I had no idea what I was meant to be doing. However, once I had spoken with the doctors there and figured out how the service works, I could then choose exactly what I wanted to do, which in a way turned out to be a good thing. In addition I found the team to be extremely friendly and willing to help with anything I asked for.

The day also starts at 07:30 with a ward round of the neurosurgical patients in high dependency, and a 'colloque' where the on-call doctor presented the cases they had seen and admitted the day/night before. During the day, I split my time between the neurosurgical consultations, theatre lists, seeing admissions to the ward and going with the on-call doctor. Often I would look at which operations interested me, and then make sure I was on the ward when that patient was admitted. I would do their history and examination, present the case to the responsible doctor and discuss the case with them. In theory we were told that we could scrub in for the operations but it depended a lot on

whether there was already someone assisting. I was able to scrub in a couple of times, and once even drill through a bit of skull and help screw it back onto the patient. The operations which were carried out were really impressive, so even though I am sure that neurosurgery is not for me, it was interesting to see what could be done. Going with the on-call doctor was also good, as you get to see a wide range of cases including patients coming in through A&E with head injuries. Other things which were interesting to observe for half a day were the neuro-psychiatric assessments and the radiotherapy using Gamma-Knife. There were also a huge number of additional 'colloques' with various neuro specialists, especially on Wednesdays, which we were expected to attend. These were usually quite complicated and I often understood very little of what was going on.

Overall this placement was fine, I would definitely recommend it if you interested in the speciality, but you do have to be quite motivated and proactive to be able to make the most of it.

ENT

This was another placement which previous students had said was good. It is a large department with multiple 'teams' of doctors responsible for different ENT sub-specialties (e.g. rhinology, oto-neurology, paediatrics, airways etc)

When we arrived, we were told that the best place to spend most of the time is in the polyclinique. This is a standard out-patient/ambulatory clinic where follow-ups and new patients are seen. When there were new cases, we were able to see the patient alone to take the history and do an ENT examination. We would then present the case to the doctor and see the patient together, and then the stagiaire wrote up the notes (which were always reviewed by the doctor, fortunately). The same applied when going with the on-call doctor, so there were opportunities to see patients alone if we wanted to. However, it was at times quite frustrating that there were a lot of students in the department. There were 2 stagiaires on the month-long placements, and then around 8-10 students in 4th year who were on week-long rotations. Occasionally we found there were more students than doctors meaning that someone did not get to see any patients, and the doctors did not always have much time for teaching. Some time was spent in theatre and I was usually able to scrub in and assist which I really enjoyed. A phone ('bip') was issued to the stagiaires where someone would call if they needed an extra pair of hands in surgery, or they wanted us to see a patient before they arrived. In reality this phone only rang a couple of times though! We could also go into endoscopy to see small interventions such as laryngoscopy and panendoscopy. During this placement, the day starts at 07:45 and finishes around 16:00 to 17:00.

On the whole I did enjoy this placement and would recommend it, you can do as much or as little as you want here, and it helped me to feel a bit more confident with ENT problems after our one week of ENT teaching at Manchester.

Practical information

Swiss etiquette and language differences

Knowing how to greet people and whether they were 'tu' or 'vous' was quite confusing for me at the beginning. Speaking to the médecin assistant, you can call them 'tu', as you can to other students. I usually called the chefs de clinique 'tu' after I got to know them a little (and they knew who I was), but sometimes I played it by ear. If in doubt, it is best to call them 'vous' until they tell you otherwise. Naturally the médecin cadre is called 'vous'. When greeting patients in the hospital, we would always shake hands. Outside of work, people in Switzerland greet each other with 3 kisses, which personally I found to be a bit overkill.

The swiss-french number system is excellent. 70 is septante, 80 is huitante and 90 is nonante (e.g. septante-huit, nonante-neuf) which makes numbers so much simpler. There are also some phrases which the swiss love to use, which include 'ça joue?' (meaning, ça marche? i.e. does that work for you?) and 'si jamais', which is often added onto the end of a sentence, and is kind of synonymous with 'by the way' in Switzerland.

Money

This is obviously an important consideration, because Switzerland as a whole is well known for being very expensive. However the amount of money you receive is proportionally higher and makes living in Lausanne possible. You will be paid a monthly salary by the hospital for your placements, this year 730 CHF, which is peanuts to a Swiss person but made a huge difference to me. There is no Erasmus grant, but it is replaced with bursary from the Swiss government of 1440 CHF paid as a lump sum towards the beginning of the placement.

I found that it was a lot less difficult than I expected it to be and more or less broke even by the end of my time there. I spent the first couple of weeks reluctant to buy anything, but once I simply accepted the fact that my weekly shop will cost twice as much as it does in the UK (I spent around 60 CHF per week on food) I worried less about it.

Transport

Lausanne has an excellent public transport service, just as long as you are travelling before midnight! Frustratingly after midnight you either have to walk (which I usually did as Lausanne is not a big city) or take a taxi. There is a small metro system with 2 lines and an extensive bus network all over the city. Any ticket is valid for the buses and the metros. I bought a "mobilis" transport pass, which gave me unlimited transport and costs 55 CHF per month

Something which I really recommend getting is the demi-tarif card. This gives you half price train travel all over Switzerland. It costs 165 CHF for the year (unfortunately you cannot buy for a shorter period of time) and is valid on boat crossings as well. The pass makes trains affordable and pays for itself quickly if you're visiting a lot of places in the surrounding area. If you have this, you can also buy single bus/metro tickets for a reduced price. Both of these passes can be bought at the transport office at Flon.

Accommodation

Apartments and 'colocations' in Lausanne are in high demand and tend to come and go very quickly, so looking for a place after you arrive is a risk that I wouldn't recommend. Rent is quite high, a reasonable amount to aim for is 500 CHF to 700 CHF per month.

University halls of residence can be arranged with FMEL (Fondation Maisons pour Étudiants Lausanne) although they are in high demand and so it is essential that you register as early as

possible. The most convenient hall of residence for medical students is Falaises because it is so close to the hospital. It is a sociable place to live and the standard of the rooms is good.

If you don't get offered a room in halls, the CHUV also provide accommodation for hospital staff, which is where I ended up. This was a small studio flat which cost me 640 CHF per month. It's not a good place to meet people, as you are essentially living on your own, but it was very close to the hospital and decent quality. There is also no Wifi provided, so I borrowed Wifi from a neighbour and paid some of his costs. There is also no kitchen equipment in the flat, so this needs to be sorted out yourself.

Arriving in Lausanne

I had to spend a few days running around sorting out administration when I first arrived. I recommend bringing several passport photos as practically everyone will need one.

- 1) Go to the 'Contrôle des Habitants' to apply for a residence permit as you are staying longer than 3 months. They will need to see your 'attestation' from the university, ID, proof of address (accommodation contract), and proof of sufficient funds to support your stay. Also remember to bring the letter stating that you are entitled to a bursary, as this means you should only have to pay 30 CHF residence tax.
- 2) The government bursary has to be paid into a swiss bank account so you will need to open one of these. I opened an account with BCV (Banque Cantonale Vaudoise), which is free to open and to close.
- 3) Go to Affaires socio-culturelles on the university campus to collect your student card and to hand in your swiss bank account details (if you have them by then) for the bursary.
- 4) Email a scanned copy of your EHIC card to the Office Vaudois de l'Assurance Maladie (this means you do not have to pay for health insurance).
- 5) Ideally before the placement begins, go to human resources at the CHUV to collect your ID badge, IT username/password and a 'carte de dépôt' which you then take to the vestiaire (6th floor, main building). This is where they issue you with a white coat.

Before you leave Lausanne, you will need to do a few things as well.

- 1) Return the completed 'annonce de départ' form to contrôle des habitants to tell them you are leaving. This can be downloaded from the site (www.lausanne.ch) and sent by post.
- 2) If you're living in CHUV accommodation, you need to tell them you will move out 1 month in advance, and fill out some more forms.
- 3) Close your bank account. With BCV, you can write a letter telling them when you want to close the account and where to transfer your money if needed. There is no deadline for this.

Conclusion

I am so glad that I did this placement, and thoroughly enjoyed my time there. Despite having fairly intensive placements with long working days, I still made the most out of being in Switzerland and as a bonus learnt a fair bit of medicine as well. My level of French and confidence improved so much during this time as a result. When I arrived I found it quite exhausting to speak French all day but it quickly got much easier, and if I ever got stuck I found that the people were patient and willing to help. I still don't know what I want to specialise in or what country I want to work in, but I think that these placements have given me some good experience and made me realise what the different opportunities we have are.

Some useful contacts:

Service de Logement CHUV : http://www.chuv.ch/chuv_home/chuv-emploi-travailler/chuv-emploi-travailler-logement.htm

Fondation Maisons pour Étudiants Lausanne : <https://www.fmel.ch/en/>

Office vaudois de l'assurance maladie – www.vd.ch/ovam. Ch. de Mornex 40
1014 Lausanne. Email: info.ovam@vd.ch <info.ovam@vd.ch>;

Contrôle des Habitants : Rue du Port-Franc 18, 1002 Lausanne. Open Monday to Friday 08:00 to 12:00 and 13:00 to 16:30.

Affaires socio-culturelles UNIL - Bâtiment Unicentre, 1015 Ecublens
<http://www.unil.ch/sasme/en/home.html>. Tel : +41 (0)21 692 21 13.

Me ! – ●●●●●●●●●●gmail.com