

European Studies Report

My Erasmus placements in Paris were:

- 1) Obstetrics and Gynaecology at Saint Joseph
- 2) General Paediatrics at Necker

I chose to study the European Option because I always enjoyed learning French at school and was considering studying languages at University rather than medicine. I didn't want to let the skills I had built up decline by not continuing to learn French. Plus, I have always enjoyed visiting France due to the culture and lifestyle, and wanted to improve my languages skills so I could make the most out of travelling there. I also thought it might look good as an extra qualification on future CVs and hoped that if I was planning to work in France in the future, it would show that I had an appropriate level of study in French language.

My first placement was Obstetrics and Gynaecology at Saint Joseph. This is in the 14th arrondissement in the South of Paris. The nearest metro station is Plaisance on the line 13. Bear in mind that Saint Joseph is a Groupe Hospitalier so is made up of several smaller hospitals, and so, for example, Obstetrics and Gynaecology was actually in a hospital called Notre Dame de Bon Secours. I would suggest making sure to ask for the name of your supervisor from the Erasmus coordinator on the first day when you go to do your paperwork at the university. When I went to the university, I was given the impression that when I arrived at the hospital, I would be on a list of students doing placements there, and therefore someone would be expecting me, so I didn't check who my supervisor was. In fact when I arrived at the hospital, no one had any idea who I was or where I was supposed to be and so I ended up being passed round the midwives, students, nurses. I then contacted the university when I went home and was given the name of my supervisor, but normally the supervisors seem to be the Chef de Service, who are the head of the whole department and therefore can be quite difficult to get hold of. Therefore I would suggest asking for the name of your supervisor and an email address in advance. If you are not given an email address, try googling the supervisors name as you may be able to find it online or on the hospital website. If you are not given the name of your supervisor I would suggest trying to find the Chef de Service or their secretary as that is who it's most likely to be. In terms of the area around the hospital, I did not explore the area very much but it is busy and seemed fairly safe.

Hospital Saint Joseph itself is modern and well-equipped. You will need to get your labcoat for the first day. To do this, you will need to go to the Bureau de Personnel which are quite difficult to find, so it is best to ask at the reception desk how to get there. There you will need to present a signed Attestation de Stage from your university and some form of ID. Then they will give you a slip which you then have to take to the Lingerie Centrale in the basement of the main building (again ask someone as it is very difficult to find and not on the hospital map) where they will give you your labcoat. Make sure to take

some cash as you will need this as a deposit for the labcoat, and if possible French phone number, as they will ask for this for their receipt.

In terms of the Obstetrics and Gynaecology placement, each day started with an 8.45am staff meeting. After there would be a variety of clinical activities to participate in, including; teaching, doctor clinic, midwife clinic, gynaecology A&E and obstetric or gynaecology theatre. I would suggest asking the students about what you might be able to participate in and when. I found that I was able to eventually build up a good idea of what was available to me during my time on the placement, and then choose which I would prefer to go to.

It is worth noting that for Obstetrics and Gynaecology surgery, it is necessary to have a student in theatre at all times. Therefore it is not like the system in England, where you turn up to theatre and ask to observe, and instead different students are scheduled in advance for theatre, usually for a week at a time and therefore if you would like to attend, you will need to arrange in advance to swap with one of the other students. I found that the other students were accommodating with this, and were generally more than happy to swap especially during their exam period. In terms of being in theatre, it was an excellent clinical opportunity, as you were expected to assist rather than just observe and there was a wide variety of different procedures going on, so I would recommend going to theatre whenever possible.

I think the most striking difference I found on my Obstetrics and Gynaecology placement was the difference in communication skills. In England we are taught to be very sensitive, especially in issues such as Obstetrics and Gynaecology. I found that in France, the doctors were a lot more abrupt and paternalistic when it came to seeing patients. There would often be little discussion of issues, or commencement of new treatments without much explanation. I think to some extent, this can be explained by a cultural difference, as I think that this behaviour was received by patients very differently from how it would be received by the average patient in England. I think certain practises that may have come across to me as abrupt or harsh may have been different in the cultural context of France and the medical system there.

In terms of the different in medical training structure, I learnt a lot from this placement. The medical course in France is 6 years, and during the 3 or 4 clinical years of medical study, you are based at the hospital, like we are in England; however you actually work as part of the team. Because of this system, the medical students there are paid, therefore you should make sure to talk to the other medical students and the Bureau de Personnel, so that you are on the system to be paid for your work at the hospital. To do this, some hospitals require you to have a French bank account, although some will accept your IBAN number for a British bank account, which can be found on your online banking or at the top of your bank statement. Usually as an Erasmus student you will be paid as a D2 student (which is equivalent of their 4th year students. You can also be paid more if you do the Garde which is an on-call shift, usually 24 hours long. You can be paid around 20 euro for these shifts, but it varies between different hospitals and wards.

Something to be aware of is that because of the difference in the training in France, you may be expected to work more as the equivalent of an FY1 rather than observing as a student would in the UK. During my first placement, I was primarily observing for example during clinic. However in other situations, such as if you ask to go to Gynaecology A+E or if you go to theatre you may be asked to clerk patients and assist. This I generally found manageable as it was similar to the activities I had undertaken during placements as a student in England, and after a brief introduction I felt more or less comfortable assisting or clerking patients when it was asked of me.

During my second placement which was General Paediatrics at Necker, it was much more like working like an FY1. There was no observation of seniors or supervisors as we would do during a placement in Manchester. Instead you were expected to take charge of your own patients and manage them as an FY1 would. I was allowed to observe the other students doing this before I took my own patients, but I would like to stress that it is very different from the placements we do in Manchester, and was not what I was expecting. It was very much like being an FY1 with your own patients and jobs which you were expected to keep up with and manage every day. You will also be required to do a weekend on-call, and to present a patient in the staff meeting to decide their management. I found this very difficult and stressful due to the language barrier, and further with it being in the sensitive area of paediatrics. When I tried to discuss this with the team it was again dealt with as if I was an FY1 who would be shifting work on to others and leaving the department short staffed if I were to not keep up with my workload as the others. I found this very difficult to deal with, and it was not something I was aware of before starting the placement as I was under the impression my time in France would primarily be observing with room for clinical involvement, as the placements with Manchester are. I wish to highlight this point so that future students might be more prepared for this situation. The placement provides excellent opportunities to see rare cases, develop language skills and engage with the French medical system, but I would only recommend it for those very confident in their French and medical skills, looking for an intense placement.

This second placement I did was at Necker Hopital des Enfants Malades in the 15th arrondissement in the South of Paris. The nearest Metro stations are Duroc (on the line 13 and line 10) and Sevres Lecourbe (on the line 6). There are also several buses which pass by Necker which may be worth looking into. The hospital itself is impressive, with historical buildings and newer modern facilities. Parts of the hospital have beautiful views of the Eiffel tower and Invalides. In terms of the surrounding area there are a few small cafes but not much else, however it is a good location to walk to Montparnasse or Invalides.

In terms of starting this placement, this went much more smoothly as I began at the same time as the French students, and therefore I was able to go with all of them to get my labcoat and ID badge. As this was my second placement I did ask for my supervisors name and email. I was given a name but no email address. I tried an internet search but did not have any success in finding contact details. Luckily a friend of mine knew a French student who was also starting on my placement at the same time, and he therefore passed on the message to me that I was supposed to be in a certain place at

830 on the first day. Had it not been for this, I was planning to come to the department at 9am to ask for my supervisor. If I had done so I would have missed the induction by the time I found the correct place as the hospital is very large, and I would have been in trouble for doing, as all the French students knew they were supposed to attend this meeting. I was lucky in my case, and am not sure what to advise, as I had specifically asked the University for reporting instructions or contact details and had not been given any. All I can suggest is maybe asking the students in your first placements if they know anyone who has done or will be doing your second placement, as they might be able to help you find where to go, and avoid making a bad first impression. I then had a brief induction and I was also given access to a Googledrive folder which had useful information about how some of the features of the ward worked, such as how to fill out growth charts and how to present patients. This placement started at 8.45 each day with a staff meeting. It is worth noting that in comparison to other placements in France, they are very strict about being on time. In my first placement, it was normal for students, doctors or midwives to come part way through the staff meetings. In my second placement at Necker they were very strict, and the meeting would start exactly at 8.45 even if the doctors were running later, so make sure to be on time.

A tip I learnt over the course of my paediatrics placement that others might find helpful include, noting down the brand names of various vaccinations and keeping a list in your labcoat. You will spend a lot of time looking at children's vaccination history and these are all written in the unfamiliar brand names used in France, often in handwriting that is difficult to read. If you keep a list of these with you it will save you a lot of time.

In terms of my linguistic development I do feel that I really improved during my placement abroad. On my second placement especially I had to speak a lot in French which was very difficult at first, but after a few weeks I found myself beginning to improve. My fluency got much better and by the end of my time in France, I found that I was fairly easily able to carry a whole conversation without needing to speak any English and not have any problems. I did feel that in some part my grammar became worse, as I would try to keep up with the fast pace of conversation, and in doing so I would think less about how to construct my sentences properly. Plus, it had been some time since I had had any French lessons, and therefore my knowledge of grammar was a little rusty. I would suggest going over this a little before going to France or when you get there, as although it sounds boring, it would allow you to make the most of the opportunities for spoken French by having good baseline knowledge. One of the things I really benefitted from in terms of my linguistics was learning common phraseology. I noticed that a lot of the words which come in frequently in French lessons, in fact may not be used that much in current spoken French and there are synonyms or alternative phrases which are used much more commonly. Although the less used language would still be understood without any problems, it makes your French seem much more fluent and natural when you speak in a way closer to French people.

In terms of my intercultural understanding, I feel I now have a better idea of French culture in general, and therefore was better able to adapt and integrate myself. I think you do need to make an active effort to engage in French culture, because it would be easy to speak minimally at hospital and

to spend your free time with other English people, as there is such a huge expatriate community in Paris. I would however recommend once you have found your feet and have some confidence, trying to push yourself to engage in French culture. It will help you understand better what happens at hospital and to interact with your colleagues better. It will also just help you get along better in day to day life, as you will be able to communicate with people better. Plus I found in Paris there were a lot of hidden gems in terms of areas, bars, restaurants, exhibitions and events. If you make an effort to get outside your comfort zone and get involved with the culture however you like, you may find suggestions or tips from people in France that really improve your experience.

I also got a better impression of how other countries view England. In terms of the medical profession, I did find that I was really lacking in terms of scientific knowledge in comparison to the French medical students. I found that they would have very detailed knowledge of pathophysiology, pharmacology and histology for example. However our medical curriculum has much more focus on research, communication, ethics and career development. I found that most senior doctors were very keen to hear about how medicine and training was conducted in England, and generally looked upon the medical practise there as very progressive and with great respect. I even found that some doctors wished to practise speaking English with me so as to further their career prospects both in academia and clinical medicine.

In terms of working there in the future, I think this was an amazing opportunity, but I remain undecided. It seems that the junior doctors in Paris worked very difficult hours, for example doing 24 hour on call shifts without any time off in law. I also sometimes found the style of communication with patients quite distressing in comparison to what I am accustomed to in England. I am not sure whether the difference in working conditions as a doctor in France may not be suited to me. However in terms of the culture and lifestyle I adored living and working in Paris. It is an amazing city. It's beautiful, there is so much culture and history to see, it's small enough to travel round and experience all the different areas of the city, and there is something for everyone. It was so enjoyable to be able to practise the French I have spent years learning. Paris is such an intellectually stimulating place, and I genuinely really enjoyed the challenge of trying everyday to improve my French, and I saw a great improvement, and I was even occasionally praised for my level of French. It was an incredible experience and I am so grateful to have done it. I would very much like to live in France in the future, not permanently but hopefully for a year or two. Having spent more time in the hospital, I am not sure if this would be for me, and I would potentially plan to work in a non clinical environment instead.

Practical Advice and Tips

- You can buy a student Navigo pass for the metro for around 75 euro each month. You can buy these from any metro stations that have a ticket office in them, which is most. You will need to take a passport photo, and potentially some kind of proof of being a student, such as a student card or attestation. You then top up the card on the 1st of each month, and you get unlimited travel on the metro, buses and RER which can take you all the way to Versailles or the Charles de Gaulle airport. When you buy your metro ticket, make sure to ask for a “numeration” of your pass, and a receipt as if you take there to the bureau de personnel at your hospital, they will reimburse you some of the cost.
- You may want to set up a French bank account which can be useful if you are paid by the hospital, as some won't accept English bank accounts, and if they do you will get less money due to the exchange rate and fees. If you want to do this, try and do it sooner rather than later, as you will need a recent proof of address, most likely the contract for your flat, dated within the last 1-2 months, depending on the bank. If it is any older than this (for example if you try to open your account in the second half of your time abroad) the bank may not accept it and it can be difficult to get your landlord to provide any other proof. If you do set up a French bank account, make sure to close it with plenty of time before you leave, as I am aware some other students had difficulty closing their accounts. Not all banks will accept you opening an account for a short period of time, so it is best to research this.
- Download the Paris Metro or RATP app. The Paris Metro app is free and can be used offline easily. The RATP is more complicated but also includes buses and trams.
- Do not bother bringing many smart clothes with you, if any. The students and doctors in France dress casually, for example in jeans and t-shirts, with their lab coat on top.
- Make sure to return your lab coat with plenty of time. It sounds simple but there may be many steps and many different offices you have to visit to return it and reclaim your money, and some of these close early or are not open every day, so it is good to leave time for this, otherwise you risk losing your deposit.
- Take any over the counter medications you might need e.g. paracetamol, anti histamines with you, as they are very expensive in France and can only be bought at the pharmacy. Pharmacists also will not sell many of the products sold over the counter normally in England.
- Take cash and a form of ID with you on the first day of each placement so you can get a labcoat
- If you would like to practise your French conversation, there is a group called Club International des Jeunes a Paris. They run various activities including cultural excursions and day trips. They also have a conversation evening every week at the Grand Mosque of Paris in the 5th arrondissement which is a really beautiful building and serves excellent mint tea and baklava. You can join for around 15 euro, and then sign up for any conversation sessions you want. They are for people wanting to learn various languages, so normally one hour is spent

speaking English and the next speaking French. Sometimes Spanish is also spoken. It is a good way to practise your speaking and meet people in Paris.

- <http://www.club-international.org/>
- The last metro is at 2am. If you miss this there is a night bus that goes to most of the main areas, however do be aware that it is did not seem very safe, and in this aspect the last metro might be a better option as it is well lit and there is always plenty of people. They also have UBER in Paris and you can use your same account and app from England.
- A lot of the museums in Paris are free if you are between 18 and 25, for example Musee d'Orsay, the Louvre and the Musee Picasso. Temporary exhibitions will still charge, but it is always worth asking.

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