

UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER

European Studies Report

Charite Universitätsmedizin, Berlin

01.02.2016 – 20.05.2016



Why I Chose to do European Studies

Why wouldn't someone choose to do European Studies? Some of my best memories from school were exchanges and holidays to various parts of Germany. I was really excited to be able to continue learning German while studying medicine.

Looking back on my 16 weeks in Berlin, it was definitely worth going through three and half years of German lessons, seven sets of internal exams, and two Goethe exams. I can now speak a second language, I've made so many friends across the whole of Europe, and I got to study in German hospitals for 4 months. It really is a unique opportunity that nobody should pass up.

Before you go...

Be really really really organised. There is a lot of paperwork and deadlines that you need to keep on top of and they quickly get away from you.

1. **Learning Agreement and Grant Agreement.** These are both forms that had to be submitted to the European Studies office in Manchester. These had to be done early on – before the end of 4th year!
2. **Famulatur.** At the start of 5th year we received the details of our first Famulatur (clinical placement) at the Charité. All of us received a placement that we had requested on our learning agreement (so make sure you actually think about these). The next step was organising our remaining three Famulatur. This was one of the more daunting things that we had to do. Here's a rough guide:

- Decide which specialty you want to do your Famulatur in.
- Decide which hospital you'd like to do it in from the list of 'Akademische Lehrkrankenhäuser der Charité'. (Use this website to check how previous students rated their Famulatur <http://www.famulaturranking.de/ranking/>)
- Search for the department in Google and find details of the secretary or the Chefarzt's secretary.
- Send an email using the template provided on the Charité Blackboard website.

It may seem a bit odd to have to organise your own placements but this is completely normal and all the secretaries were very helpful. I'd recommend sorting this out in September. It's not the end of the world if you don't but the popular Famulatur go early (and later on exempting exams will take priority). If you apply to a hospital that isn't one of the main Charité hospitals then there might be some extra paperwork about occupational health to fill out – no matter how many emails you send you will have to make an appointment with a Hausarzt and get the forms signed. It's a pain but very easy to do.

3. **Accommodation.** Accommodation in Berlin is not easy to find. I would strongly recommend sorting it out before you get there to avoid some sleepless nights in that first week.

The found my flat on www.wg-gesucht.de. It's easily the biggest website out there but I would also recommend looking on Facebook. There are loads of Facebook groups and pages that are dedicated to WGs and loads of pages for Berlin students that are also worth looking at. Set aside an hour per day for 3 to 4 weeks of trawling through the internet before you find a place. It is then standard in Germany to have some sort of interview with the current tenants before they decide if they want to live with you or not (it is rarely organised directly with the landlord or landlady). Exercise some caution though – around 50% of the replies I got on these sites seemed to be scams.

Expect rent (including bills) to be similar to Manchester. I lived in Friedrichshain. Don't worry too much about where you end up living, the important thing is finding somewhere to live. On a map of the public transport of Berlin, if you are within the Ring then you'll be able to get to all bits of the city in a reasonable amount of time. If you want to be fussy, I'd recommend living somewhere along the U1 line (Friedrichshain, Kreuzberg, Schöneberg, and Charlottenburg) as this is where a lot of nice bars and places to eat are.

4. [Charite Language Test](#). The Charite required all incoming students to sit an online language test. This had to be done in September but we all failed the first time around so they told us to resit it in November. The level of German wasn't particularly difficult but the layout of the exam was odd so it might be worth having a few practice goes at it before taking it for real. It is really important to pass this test because you'll have to take German lessons in Berlin if you don't and that would mean missing a Famulatur.
5. [EHIC, passport, immunisation certificates](#). Make sure that these are in date and take them with you! They are all needed in the first week to allow you to register at the university and for your occupational health appointment.

When you arrive...

I got to Berlin a full week before my first Famulatur was due to begin. This was a great week for relaxing and seeing the city but there were also 4 important jobs to be done. Do not underestimate the bureaucracy that you will be faced with upon your arrival. There isn't much leeway in the German system if you bring the wrong form or don't have a hard copy of it.

1. [Anmeldung einer Wohnung](#). This is registering your address with the German government. It is necessary to do this to go through Immatrikulation (enrolment at the Charite). To do this you have to go to any Bürgeramt in Berlin (it doesn't have to be your local one). There is an appointment system but it is fully booked for months so the easiest thing to do is to turn up on the day and queue to be seen. I'd advise getting there an hour before opening time and waiting, otherwise you may not get seen on that day.

There are 2 forms that you should download from the Bürgeramt website and fill them in with your flatmates or landlord/lady before you go. These forms seem to change fairly regularly so, if you're not sure which to take, just fill them all out and take them all. Going to

a Bürgeramt isn't an experience you'll want to repeat. Take all documents they could feasibly want from you (passport etc).

2. **Paying the university fee.** This is a small administration fee that you must pay the Charite before Immatrikulation. The Charite Erasmus team will send you details of how to do this before you set out to Berlin. I did it in a bank in Berlin but it can also be done online. As a rule, to avoid hefty charges and poor conversion rates, always try to use something like transferwise.com to move money from £ to Euro. It'll save you a lot of money. Don't feel too bad about paying it though – you receive a travel pass on all public transport in Berlin once you do Immatrikulation.
3. **Immatrikulation.** This was a short meeting with the Erasmus office at the Charite. Again, take all documents that they could possibly ask you for with you and photocopies (they will refuse to do photocopies in their office). The ones you may not think of are your Anmeldungbescheinigung, your EHIC, and a receipt of paying the tuition fee.
4. **Occupational Health.** The Erasmus team in Berlin will organise an occupational health appointment for you. The occupational health department will be surprised and annoyed that you don't have an Impfpass so it's a good idea to take any vaccination certificates you can find with you. They'll take some blood and probably book you in for a second appointment to receive a hep. A vaccination (if you haven't already had one) and a boosters of any vaccinations that are starting to wear off.

After this, there's nothing to stop you from starting the placements ☺

German Hospitals

The German healthcare system isn't too dissimilar to the NHS. There are Assistenzärzte (junior doctors), Fachärzte (junior doctors who have passed their consultancy exams), Oberärzte (consultants), and Chefarzte (the chief consultant of each department). The big, noticeable difference is that patients must have health insurance but the system is not fully privatised as most hospitals are still run under funding from the government. In practice, the investigations and treatment that you'll see at the Charite is very similar to what you'll see here.

A Famulant/in has a fairly clearly defined role in the hospital. Expect to start every morning by taking a lot of bloods and putting a lot of cannulas in. After that, you'll follow what's left of the ward round, before spending the afternoon clerking the new admissions, assisting in theatre, or doing jobs on the ward. It's 5 days a week and each day will usually be around 8am – 4 pm (although it is sometimes longer and sometimes shorter).

Don't worry about taking any smart clothes for hospital. Everyone, even the Oberärzte just wear jeans and t-shirt with a Kittel (white coat) over the top. I bought a Kittel from Lehmann's when I arrived in Berlin. This was a mistake - a Kittel was provided for me on each of my placements and I didn't use my one once. So I'd definitely ask the secretary once you've organised your Famulatur

whether you need your own Kittel. Also, if you still have your lab coat from first and second year, that would definitely pass as a Kittel, you wouldn't have to buy a new one.

For me, a very surprising difference between German and British hospitals was the level of detail in each. In the UK, every patient has a wrist band, patients' names and dates of birth are checked before every blood test, and before every operation there is a timeout to make sure there are as few mistakes as possible. In Germany, despite the love of paperwork and following rules, I never saw a timeout, and coming across a patient with a wristband was a very rare occurrence.

Obstetrics and Gynaecology

I was really excited to get started on my placements and to get to experience medicine at the world-famous Charite. One important thing to note is that you will be exhausted. Having not had a 9-5 day since mid-December, the first Famulatur hit me like a train and for the first 2 weeks I would get home and just watch Netflix for an hour or two before going to bed nice and early. Luckily this didn't last too long and I soon got used to the 8-4 routine of the hospital.

This was my first placement, which I did at Charite Virchow Klinikum. I spent 2 weeks on gynaecology and then 2 weeks on obstetrics. My first day started by seeing the secretary, signing a lot of forms, her checking my student card and passport, then heading off to a faraway building to collect my Kittel and keys.

Learning German for 10 years couldn't prepare me for the first Besprechung (handover). The doctors presented their patients so quickly and used so many abbreviations that I didn't recognise that I think I understood about 2 words. It wasn't a massive confidence booster but the Stationsärzte (Assistentärzte that are working on the ward that week) were all very nice and explained any questions I had.

The doctors were very relaxed about what I did in the department as long as I took the bloods first thing. This meant that I was able to spend a lot of time in theatre.

Respiratory Medicine

My second placement was at Vivantes Klinikum in Friedrichshain. The placement had 3 huge positives for me:

- It was a 5 minute walk from my WG
- Famulants/ins were entitled to free lunch up to 5 Euro each day at the canteen.
- The respiratory team were genuinely the nicest group of doctors that I've ever worked with and I really felt like I was part of the team.

There are lots of Vivantes hospitals across Berlin. Vivantes is a company that runs the hospitals for profit – they are not government run or part of a university. However, on a day to day basis in the hospital I did not notice that difference. They accept all patients, just like any other hospital, and

have all the normal equipment, just like any other hospital. They're not at all what you'd expect a private hospital in the UK to be like. This hospital was more of a DGH size but I know a couple of the other Vivantes hospitals were just as big as the Charite hospitals.

The general structure of my day here was: arrive at 8am, take bloods and put in cannulas, join the end of the ward round, enjoy a free lunch at the canteen, spend the afternoon clerking, in bronchoscopy, or writing letters.

Writing patient letters is not as daunting as it sounds – just make it clear how bad your German is and how bad your letter-writing is and the doctor will still make you do it but check over it carefully afterwards.

Out of my 4 Famulatur, this is the one I would recommend – you'll be very welcome there and, even though I don't find respiratory medicine particularly interesting, this was my favourite.

Emergency Medicine

My 3rd Famulatur was at Vivantes am Urban. This was also a brilliant placement. As a Famulant/in you'll be expected to see your own patients, do the history and examination, do basic investigations (bloods, ECG etc.), write up in the patient's notes, and then present the patient to one of the doctors to suggest further investigations and management. Having spoken to one of the other European Studies students, who also had an emergency medicine placement, I think this format is pretty much standard for students in all emergency departments.

On this Famulatur I was expected to do 8 hours per day but it was very flexible as to when I did this. Normally I just did 8am-4pm but the option was also open for me to do 2pm-10pm or something similar. I didn't have to let them know when I was coming, as long as I was there each day. This was quite nice as I could plan when I went to hospital around my other plans in the day.

Not everything on this placement was perfect though - the triage system in German emergency departments doesn't seem as robust as what we have in the UK. So a lot of things that we would have sent to a walk-in centre managed to make its way into the emergency department. I think about 50% of the patients I clerked had something along the lines of 'I've had a slight pain in my tummy for the last 3 years'. This could be a little frustrating as it was meant to be an emergency placement but I was still able to learn a lot from these cases.

Gastroenterology

For my final Famulatur I was back at Charite Virchow Klinikum. This placement followed the traditional pattern of 8-4, taking lots of bloods and cannulas each morning, before joining the ward round, and clerking patients in the afternoon.

Again, the Assistenzärzte on this placement were really friendly and supportive. I realised on this placement how bad my clerkings up to this point had been. All the doctors on this placement were

real sticklers for detail and after this placement I feel much more prepared for my foundation training.

Unfortunately on this placement there was a tendency for the day to overrun to around 5 or 6. On my final placement I really wanted to be leaving as early as possible to fit in a lot of last minute sightseeing. On the other hand, they were very encouraging and while on this placement I did a couple of ascetic drains.

What I've gained from the European Studies programme

- Linguistic Development. Having taken German to A-Level at school, I was really keen to keep it going through university. I know that my German improved during years 1 to 4 because we took the external exams and I saw my marks improve. The biggest jump in my linguistic ability came on my 16 week placement in Berlin. I went from barely understanding a word in my first handover to being able to confidently clerk and plan the management of a placement. Unfortunately I didn't manage to find accommodation with Germans so at my WG I didn't get to practice my German too much.

- Inter-Cultural Understanding. Berlin is a melting pot of so many different people. The 2 biggest populations are German and Turkish but you'll hear a lot of languages being spoken as you walk around the city. The Charité had a lot of different Erasmus students from all over Europe too. There were loads of social events organised by the Erasmix group and I had a great time meeting all the different students.

There are lots of museums and art galleries throughout Berlin. It's worth visiting as many of these as possible. My favourites were the Jewish Museum, the DDR Museum, and Topography of Terror.

- Ideas and Future Plans. Following my 16 weeks in Berlin, I haven't changed my mind on my future speciality just yet. However, the experience had made me certain that I want to work abroad at some point in my future career (not permanently, but for a year or 2). And I am now also really keen to learn another language and to try and see as many different places as possible.

Don't miss while you're in Berlin...

- [Mauerpark on Sunday afternoons](#). Once Berlin starts to warm up, Mauerpark comes alive on a Sunday afternoon. There is always a flea market with lots of delicious food and lots of live music/busking, but when it is not raining there is a huge open-air karaoke that is well worth visiting. I spent 4 or 5 Sundays there listening to some brilliant singers and some truly terrible singers. The first Sunday that it was on during our visit was Easter Sunday but google for Bearpit Karaoke to find out when it'll be next year.

- [Wannsee and Potsdam](#). Wannsee is a large lake to the southwest of Berlin. When the water has warmed up a bit, there is a sandy beach that you can get on for 3 Euro (we only had one weekend sunny enough to do this). But, during the colder weather, the lake is surrounded by the Grönauwald, which is great for a nice afternoon walk. Potsdam is on the other side of Wannsee. Definitely visit it on a sunny day. It's a small city that couldn't be more different from Berlin – pristine streets,

beautiful old palaces, and very expensive. The Sanssouci gardens are huge and you can spend a whole day wandering around them.

- **Bars and pubs.** Berlin is full of great bars and pubs, and I'm sure you'll all find 20 amazing ones even if you don't visit any of the ones I'm about to mention. As a general rule, there are loads of cheap, nice bars on the U1 line, starting in Boxenlagerplatz (near Warschauerstrasse), going through Schlesisches Tor, Görlitzer Bahnhof, Kotbusser Tor, and onwards to Schöneberg. Getting off at any one of these stations, you'll be able to find a bar. Here's a list of some nice places:

1. Mein Haus am See, Prenzlauerberg. Popular bar that gets busy on weeknights as well as the weekend. Expect to queue if you get there lateish.
2. Hops and Barley, Friedrichshain. A great pub that brews and sells their own beer. Never gets too busy so you can normally find a table.
3. Krunkelkranich, Neukölln. A rooftop bar on top of the shopping arcade in Neukölln (maybe save this one for a sunny spring day). I went once at around 8pm on a Friday and queued for an hour, I went once on a Saturday afternoon and walked straight in.
4. Bellushi's, Prenzlauerberg. An Australian youth hostel /sports bar. I'd recommend going here to watch any sports games. I watched the 6 Nations and a few premier league matches here and the atmosphere was always good.
5. Madame Claude's, Kreuzberg. A slightly odd but fun underground bar that has live music on the bottom level.

- **Brunch.** Going to a café on the weekend for brunch is a good idea when you're in Berlin. Lots of the places that are bars by night, double up as brunch places in the morning/afternoon. Silo in Friedrichshain was especially good.

- **Festivals.** 2 big festivals happened while I was in Berlin – Erste Mai (Labour day) is a much bigger deal in Germany than it is in the UK. There was a huge party in Kreuzberg that I went to, while across the city and Europe in general there were lots of protests which could get violent. The second one was Karneval der Kulturen. Exactly like it sound, Karneval der Kulturen was a huge parade that went through Kreuzberg celebrating lots of different cultures and the whole weekend felt like one big party.

- **The Erasmix Group.** All of my best friends in Berlin were other Erasmus students at the Charite. Unfortunately, it's not too easy to meet them; we arrived just as they were all revising for their semester 1 exams, and then lots of them left and new students arrived in April for semester 2 as we were leaving in May. That being said, the Erasmix team (a Facebook group) organise lots of social events and there may well be other Erasmus Charite Facebook groups that you should search for. I'd recommend getting in touch with them.

Useful Contacts

Charite Erasmus Office: international-students@charite.de

Bürgeramt website with a list of offices: <https://service.berlin.de/standorte/buergeraemter/>