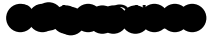

European Studies Report

Berlin 2016



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1. Introduction

For me, choosing to study on the European Studies programme as part of my Medical degree was an easy choice to make. I have always loved learning languages and learning about the culture and history of other countries - to the end result of having studied German and Japanese for an extended period of time. Unfortunately, as the name suggests, exploring Japanese and medicine was not an option - but I was nonetheless keen to take my German studies further. A large part of my initial choice for the ES programme lay in the ability to practice and improve my German language skills (in first year a final year placement seemed so far away this didn't really feature as much in my decision!).

Since then I have not only been able to improve my linguistic skills, but have also had opportunities to explore German culture and history, to explore how medicine differs in another developed country, and also to develop more personal skills such as organisation and time management (vital when trying to balance a full Medical degree with language learning). During the second half of fourth year, we were asked to hand in a ranking of the different German universities we could study at - again this was a simple choice for me - to be able to study and undertake placements in Berlin at the Charite organisation would be the ideal end to final year.

2. Pre-Departure

From the second semester of fourth year, we were asked to start organising various elements related to placement - starting with where to go. The options for us were Berlin, Homburg and Hannover, with the latter two having accommodation available (although it's worth checking this as it could vary year to year). As I was placed in Berlin, the rest of this report is specific to the Charite.

After finding out your allocation, there are a whole host of different things that we had to complete, which roughly fall into the following categories (and forgive me if I have forgotten anything!):

1. Paperwork related to the **Charite (partner) University** e.g. learning agreements, log in details for Blackboard (Charite), and various other bits and pieces. This is all co-ordinated via the "My Placements" tab on my.manchester.ac.uk and direct emails. In January you will also be asked to pay semester fees of roughly 250 Euro and to bring the receipt for this when registering as a student at the start - as a tip, you can convert the money and bring 250 euro, and pay it in at a Postbank upon arrival with a payment of around 6 euro (helps to reduce fees). However, as a fully registered student you will have access to free transport around Berlin.
2. **University Placement abroad department** - there were a number of different lectures put on in the build up to the placement, with a few marked as mandatory. As a tip - I found that these mandatory lectures clashed with my OSCE exams, and was able to rearrange attendance to the pre-departure meetings before Christmas in final year.
3. **Erasmus** - there was a specific form we had to fill out (no electronic signatures) and email to the erasmus department, a "CashPassport" we had to collect, and one or two other bits such as a confirmation of arrival certificate. It goes without saying though that these forms were well worth completing - the erasmus grant is roughly 250 Euro/month (although they calculated our attendance as 3 months 20 days). There are also various bits, including a language test, which you have to do during/before the placement (but you will be sent emails about these).

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4. **Placements** - perhaps a more important element, as part of the paperwork from the Charite we were originally asked to write down a few placements we would like to have, and Nikola Lepom then organised one of these. It was never made overly clear to us - essentially you can pick most areas by looking at the charite hospital website. After this initial placement, you are then left to organise the final 3 yourself, which although daunting at first proved simple enough - there is a template email on the Charite Blackboard system, and I personally found most places were fast to reply (although word of caution - I left my final placement until January to organise, to try and decide which speciality, and then found it significantly more difficult to find a placement in that speciality).
 5. **General Bits** - including registering at the Burgeramt , accommodation, flights, etc

Burgeramt

I felt I should make a special mention of this. You will be asked to register at the Burgeramt with your accommodation details when you arrive in Berlin, as part of the process for registering as a student. Most of the group in my year didn't try to make appointments until we got there - only to find it was near impossible to get an appointment before March. We did also try to simply turn up, as previous reports suggested, but after a very long que we were told there were no appointments for the day, and were given one for March. It's very easy to book appointments online - new ones go onto the system roughly once a week, about 6-8 weeks in advance - and you only need to give your name and email address to get an appointment. Before going to this appointment, there are 2 forms you need to fill out, one specifically by the landlord/agency/or even flatmate (anyone who "gave" you the accommodation technically). Afterwards you have a certificate - ensure you copy this and take it with you to register as a student.

As a sidenote - if you can't complete the Anmeldung before your appointment for university registration, don't worry too much - we were given 4 weeks (and a temporary transport pass for that time) to get it completed.

Flights and accommodation

Unfortunately I can't offer much insight into finding accommodation as I stayed with someone I knew who lived in Berlin (and sorted this in October). However, from previous and current students I am aware that it can be difficult to find accommodation, and everyone has recommended starting your search early. Some also found staying in temporary accommodation such as hostels for the first few days was useful to give more time for the search.

I personally chose to fly out after the results of exempting exams - I wanted to have guaranteed internet access and be able to speak with the SWAP office if I didn't pass. But I know the others went out much sooner and made the most of having free time in Berlin. The only real downside for me was that I didn't have too much time to settle in and explore Berlin (and to start working on my German) before having to start placements - a jump into the deep end! As a final note - I flew out of London as I had already moved back home, and found that all 3 airlines (easyjet, ryanair and BA) had effectively similar prices (when including luggage) when booked early enough - but for later bookings/last minute easyjet are the best bet.

Money

Our year received the Erasmus grant in early February, but I am aware that there were problems the year before. I would recommend taking, if possible, a reasonable amount of Euro with you (or have the option to withdraw some from a bank card) - in case the Erasmus money is delayed reaching your CashPassport card. The cashpassport card is simple enough to use - you will need to activate it prior to leaving via the website (and get a PIN by doing so) - and there is a charge of 3.75 euro per withdrawal (but I believe no charge if using it as a debit/credit card in store). It is also worth considering that you will be paid 70-80% of the total grant allowance, and that this remaining money may not be paid to you until after you return to the UK.

3. Placements

In general, a surgical placement starts at 7am and a medical one at 8am (but this varied quite a lot). Medical students in Germany are expected to take bloods, put in cannulas, and often to clerk patients - there are no phlebotomists! This however is the perfect experience in the run up to FY1 to help you improve such basic skills. Generally there are two types of student on the wards - Famulant and PJ. A PJ student is a final year (6th year in Germany) student who essentially is on placement full time, and expected to do a variety of jobs (depending on the specific placement). A Famulant is a student in any other year - and with differing levels of experience. This gave quite a unique ability to both be taught and to teach other students. Generally speaking we are somewhere inbetween these two levels - if you want to push yourself more though, I would suggest introducing yourself as a PJ student. You are expected to attend 5 days a week, 8 hours a day, unless it is a bank holiday. However, I found that this could also vary dramatically - for instance, my first placement would often be 7.30am - ~5pm, but it is best to be clear about the expectations on the very first day. And as a separate note - I personally got caught out by differences in illness rules - after 3 days you need an "Attest" (essentially a GP sick note) to say you are ill, but I wasn't aware and so didn't have one. In the end it wasn't a problem, but it is worth bearing in mind if you find yourself ill.

During the first week we also had to attend an occupational health appointment - pretty standard as per the UK - but you need to have a copy of your vaccination record (I used the one from Manchester occ. health which seemed to be fine, but check that the vaccination list is clear - and it helps to know the German names for the vaccines too). You also have a variety of blood tests, and will be sent the results of these in the post along with your completed occupational health assessment. Before this appointment they ask you to bring a self addressed, stamped envelope for this reason (I found a shop near to Charite Campus Virchow that sold envelopes and stamps).

Doctors and medical students in Germany still wear a Kittel or white coat, and I found that more often than not you would have the option to borrow a hospital Kittel for each placement (best to email if unsure before the placement). However, I was unaware of this and bought my own before the placements - it costs 25-30 euro and you can buy one from a bookshop called Lehmann's at Campus Charite Mitte. Personally I found this easier in the

end - I didn't have to worry about emptying it at the end of each placement (other than to wash it) and I didn't need to worry about forgetting to hand it back.

For each placement you complete, you will have 2 forms to fill out. One is a relatively simple certificate from the Charite that the secretary/Chefarzt (Etc) complete. Personally I found it best to ask the Secretary at the start of the placement when it would be best to hand a part-filled form to them, and when I could collect it (I got caught out on a placement when the secretary was away for a week - so this made it much easier for future placements). There is also a Manchester University form (eform) - which is much simpler than the placement forms you will be used to filling in, and can be filled in by any doctor on the ward (often it was an Assistenzarzt(in) who would do this). Again, it is useful to mention this form to the doctors on your first day and to ask who will be able to fill it out. At the end of your placement you will need an appointment with Angelika to convert these Charite certificates into your transcript. As with everything else, you need to have copies of all the certificates. It is also worth emailing her at least a month in advance - I found it more difficult to make the appointment as she was ill/on holiday/ etc - so notice really helps to make the process as smooth as possible.

a. Trauma and Reconstructive Surgery

This was my very first placement in Berlin, located at Charite Virchow, and was a combination of trauma and orthopaedic surgery. The day started around 7.30am with a morning post op (and on Tuesdays teaching) radiology meeting followed by intensive care ward rounds. I was expected to arrive after 7am, as we aimed to take as many bloods as possible before the meeting. Afterwards there were a range of possible tasks - from bloods and cannulas to going into theatre and also attending ward rounds. I also learnt how to remove sutures (not quite the same as when doing this on a model) and how to take blood samples from a central venous line (many patients had these). Furthermore, I was able to assist in theatres alot more than in the UK. There was also the possibility to attend outpatient clinics - a different type of orthopaedics each day - and this is where I encountered some of my most memorable and interesting patients from my time in Berlin.

On balance, this placement was very good for building up basic skills like venepuncture and cannulation, and for observing in theatre. Almost every day there would be 3-5 full day theatre lists, covering most forms of orthopaedics, and students were allowed to go in and out of theatre as they wanted. This was a fantastic experience for anyone even slightly surgically minded - I found that the surgeons were generally keen on getting students involved where possible. Some of the procedures I had not seen in the UK before (as the Charite center is more like a tertiary centre) - including seeing a hip replacement in a patient from outside the EU following a #NOF whilst very young - the challenges of this particular operation I will remember!

Some of the downsides to this placement were the long days - often 7am to around 5pm - sometimes with little to do in the late afternoon before the discussion of the pre-op list for the next day. Given this was my first placement, it was also more of a culture shock just how much more medical students are expected to do on placement - but having come to the end of the placement, I can appreciate just how beneficial this is, and how many more learning opportunities there are as a result.

b. Neurosurgery

I chose this placement due to a personal interest in neurosurgery, and wanted to explore what it was like to work in this speciality. Immediately one of the positives of this placement was the abundance of other medical students - this was helpful when I wasn't able to cannulate a difficult patient, or when I had other problems. The ward rounds in neurosurgery began at 7am each day, and so we were expected to arrive shortly before this. At 7.30am there was a radiology meeting (followed by one in the afternoon as well), and afterwards we joined onto the ICU ward round. Following this the medical students would have to complete ward jobs - bloods, cannulas, physio referrals etc - but were then free to choose what to do. We were able to go into theatres, go to A+E for consults with the ward doctors, and there was the option to go to clinic. Students were also randomly chosen to present a research paper in the early morning meetings - but always had the option to do so in English if preferred.

Overall I found this placement one of the more rewarding ones, although I suspect this is in part due to my underlying interest in the speciality. Several of the ward doctors were interested in teaching - particularly how to interpret head MRI/CT scans - although this was often limited by the sheer workload they had. The centre itself is very specialist, and so I encountered patients from many areas of the world who had come to the clinic specifically for treatment.

c. Cardiothoracic Surgery

This was the first placement I attended at charite Mitte. The day itself would begin at 7.30am with a team meeting, after which the medical students would take blood. Generally there would only be a handful though - a far cry from my first placement - and so this placement is less useful if you wish to improve on skills. After this we could either stay on the ward, often joining the ward round (again, I found the doctors here were very willing and keen to teach) or go into theatre. The operations in cardiothoracic surgery were long, and so often you may only see one (or even just part of one) a day at most (unless you choose to stay late). Around 11am pre-op patients would start to arrive. In stark contrast to previous placements, we were expected to clerk these patients - check they had had all tests as needed, take a focussed pre-op history and examination, and put in a cannula and take bloods. Indeed this was the only time I was able to practice cannulation on this placement. Most days there would be between 2-5 patients, divided up between the medical students as appropriate. The PJ students on the ward were incredibly helpful and supportive with this at the start - they allowed me to observe, and then observed me clerking patients and gave feedback. We would then present the patients to the ward doctors, who would often give teaching e.g. from the imaging of the patient, and would go to consent the patient. Overall this placement was one of the best for improving and practising my medical German, and there was always opportunity to attend theatre. The main downside, in my opinion, was the relative lack of opportunity to practice skills.

d. Internal Medicine

After completing three surgical placement in teaching hospitals, I wanted to complete a medical placement (preferably in a DGH or similar) for the final placement. During this last placement I have had ample opportunity to develop skills (especially as many of the patients on the ward have poor veins) and to observe new investigations/ treatments such as pleuritic taps. I was the only medical student on this placement initially - and I found that the staff were all very grateful to have an extra set of hands to help! I also found that all the doctors were incredibly keen to teach - and so more often than not found myself being asked questions about diagnosis, investigations, and treatment. On this placement the day started either at 7.40am with an imaging meeting, or between 8-8.30am with bloods. From 8.30am the ward rounds would take place, and this was both good for teaching and for asking questions. After the ward round I would often assist the doctors in their job list, but could equally attend the investigations department or clerk in new patients. In the early afternoon there would be a second meeting to discuss both current patients and new patients that had been clerked in relation to their ongoing management and any questions from the ward doctors. After this I had multiple options - attend the investigations department, assist in ward based duties, or study.

Overall I found this placement useful for honing basic skills like cannulas, whilst also being able to strengthen my understanding of patient investigation and management. The team there were very welcoming and I found they were keen to teach. On a side note, the hospital also provided free lunch (a perk I believe of most of the DGHs).

4. Living and Working in Berlin

The most difficult part of my stay in Berlin was trying to balance work with sightseeing! I won't go in to too much depth here - a lot of this is covered in other reports, and suffice to say that from the outset there are many elements to life in Berlin which are different to the UK. One question I had before leaving was whether or not I should get a new sim card (mainly for internet access) - in the end I found I didn't need to use the internet whilst out and about, and the Charite hospitals had wifi (password needed) which helped. In terms of texts - I found that my phone provider charged a negligible cost for this and so overall it wasn't an issue. Having said that, I know the other students did purchase sim cards, so it really depends on whether you think it will be cheaper or not.

Sightseeing

A quick look at tourist books, previous ES reports, and websites such as trip advisor will give you plenty of ideas for things to see and do in Berlin. Rather than repeat all of these, I thought I'd give a condensed list of a few places that are less mentioned but well worth a visit

- Stasi Prison
- Concentration Camp
- Potsdam: Glienecke Bridge, Schloss Cecilienhof and Haus der Wannsee Conference
- Easter Markets
- East Side Gallery (a stretch of the Berlin wall)

One final note - I didn't realise until the end of my stay in Berlin, but it is possible to buy a museum card which lasts for 3 days. As a student the cost of this is 12 euro, and it covers a lot of museums across Berlin - definitely worth it overall. It covers the museums on museum Island too - although for the Neues Museum and Pergamonmuseum I would recommend reserving (for free) a time slot ticket - on the website these are listed as ubriges and say frei. It is also usually possible to use a UK student card in most museums/places - handy whilst you wait for the Charite student pass.

It is also possible to buy an annual museum pass (student cost around 25 Euro) - this is possibly the most cost effective solution and means you can visit different museums at leisure over your stay.

5. Hints and Tips, Practical Issues

- Booking flights:
 - The best price depends on where you fly from - from London, booking early November, they all cost a similar amount when including baggage
 - The guide book you receive says that the office for Nikola and Angelika are closed Mondays - on arrival Nikola made clear we could make appointments for the Transcript by emailing in advance, and on any other day
- At the end of the placement you need a transcript of records - take the 4 placement certificates (or 3) to Angelika and exchange them for a transcript. Ensure you email Angelika well in advance for this appointment - I emailed to find out she would be away during the time period I needed to see her
- Make copies of everything! Passport, EHIC card, burgeramt registration, etc - you will need copies initially
- Make sure you confirm where the hospital is - even if you email an address for CVK, it may still end up being a placement at Mitte
- Organise placements ASAP - popular ones like A+E get booked up quickly
- GPs
 - I became ill and needed to see a GP - but hadn't figured out any of the key things (like where the nearest one was/phone number, how it works with the EHIC card, etc) beforehand - I would recommended a simple google search to remedy this when you know your accommodation location. Hopefully you don't need the information, but it's far easier to do when you aren't unwell.
- VPN
 - You can download a VPN for Manchester to be able to watch UK TV e.g. from iPlayer etc.

6. Useful Contacts and Websites

Below are listed useful contacts for trying to organise placements - both for the placements I completed as above, and other email addresses which I know to work.

(CCV = Virchow, CCM = Mitte)

- Trauma and Reconstructive Surgery, CCV
 - karen.scholz@charite.de (secretary to Herr Univ.-Prof. Dr. Norbert Haas)
- Neurosurgery, CCV
 - peter.vajkoczy@charite.de
- Cardiothoracic Surgery, CCM
 - pascal.dohmen@yahoo.de
- Internal Medicine, specialism in cardiology, vascular and diabetes, Krankenhaus Hubertus
 - innere.hubertus@pgdiakonie.de
- A+E, CCF
 - marion.schwarz@charite.de
 - rettungsstelle-cbf@charite.de
- A+E, CCM + CVK
 - dorit.wainwright@charite.de
 - <http://notfallmedizin.charite.de>

Some useful websites:

- Burgeramt anmeldung
 - General information: <https://service.berlin.de/dienstleistung/120686/>
- berlin .de - general tourist information