

End of placement report

MBChB European Option (French)



Lyon 2018

Why I chose to do European Option

Throughout secondary school I was always quite scientifically minded, which is why I chose to study medicine. However, when the deadline of deciding my A Level subjects loomed, I realized that I needed something different that would allow me to explore different aspects of life outside of medicine and science. French offered me an opportunity to learn something which requires a completely different set of skills. Upon commencing my studies at Manchester, it seemed logical to continue learning French as I didn't want to drop a subject that I really enjoyed. The possibility of having 4 months of placement in France was also very appealing! Moreover, studying a foreign language is something that sets you apart from other students, particularly in the UK where languages are not encouraged as "everyone speaks English". While English is a universal language, being able to speak to people in their mother tongue is a much more rewarding experience. However, as I found out on my placement in Lyon, speaking two languages is nothing as most of the other Erasmus students speak at least three languages fluently!

Why Lyon?

I had never visited Lyon prior to my Erasmus placement. Everyone seemed to be enamored with Paris but it never appealed to me. When I visited the city for an occasional weekend I found it too big and too claustrophobic at the same time. However, from studying in Manchester I have grown to love city life and I wasn't ready to pack off and move to the countryside. Lyon seemed perfect, it was a similar size to Manchester and was a major student city. Through further research on Facebook and then when I actually arrived I also found out that the music scene is incredible, you can literally find any genre of live music in the many bars and clubs that Lyon has to offer, which was a huge selling point for me.

Arrival

Bureaucracy

Unlike a lot of other students I spoke to who were studying in Paris, my university paperwork for studying at Lyon-Est was more or less completed by June of the previous year. My advice would be to manage your time effectively, I left mine rather last minute as I was writing my dissertation and didn't realise that academic transcripts can take up to 10 days to arrive! Generally, though, Lyon-Est was quite relaxed about it as long as you have the majority of your documents. If you're struggling to get pieces, talk to Mirka or Emma from the European Option programs as they really helped me a lot with the application process. In general, you will need:

- Letter from head of European Option proving that you are a student in Manchester
- Academic transcript
- Learning agreement forms (they will be extensively checked by the university so make sure you set aside enough time to complete them properly)

Flights

During fifth year and with the freight trains of OSCEs, progress test and EMQs rapidly approaching, you might think it may be better to not book flights until you know that you have passed. However, while it feels like you're tempting fate, you will save a substantial

amount of money if you book earlier. You can still do your placement even if you fail, as long as you check with the coordinators.

Direct flights from Manchester to Lyon seemed to only be provided by FlyBe. A word of warning, get the earliest flight it possible as it is almost always delayed later in the day (speaking from personal experience and those of friends). There are other companies, but they generally aren't much cheaper and take a lot longer, the Flybe flight usually takes about 90 mins. From the airport you can get the Rhônexpress (approx. €14) which will take you to the city centre. However, if there are a group of you going to Lyon, it might save time and hassle to get a taxi from the airport to your accommodation.

Accommodation

There are many options for accommodation in Lyon, with a massive variation in price. Personally, I chose university accommodation as it seemed like a good place to meet new people and live reasonably cheaply. The university will send you lots of information regarding accommodation (called CROUS accommodation). I chose the cheapest option - la résidence universitaire André Allix - which only cost 194€ per month. However, you should to consider other aspects of the accommodation, as a friend of mine lived in another CROUS residence much nearer the city centre with an ensuite for 280€ a month. From speaking to the other Erasmus students, it is also possible to live with families for the four months that you are there. From the several students that I talked to about it, the monthly rent ranged from around 300-400€. The majority of them found these apartments on Airbnb or on the Erasmus Facebook page.

There are several things you should consider before deciding which type of accommodation to choose:

1. Price – this was a huge factor for me as the cost of living in France is higher than Manchester.
2. Level of organization – choosing university accommodation required significantly less time to prepare beforehand, which is important to think about during fifth year and final exams. From speaking to other ES students, the main worry with finding an apartment yourself is that you will not be able to inspect it beforehand, and many landlords will generally expect a deposit in advance.
3. Sociability – although I lived in halls of residence, there was no common area or even a table in the kitchen to get together and talk to people. Renting an apartment with a French family or roommates also has the added advantage of improving your language skills, as the language used in medical situations is rather different that the everyday language that the French use.
4. Location – I lived in the 5th arrondissement, which was scenic and beautiful but situated on top of a very tall hill. Most of the other students lived in the 7th (there is also another university hall of residence here called La Madeleine), which was reasonably cheap and more centrally located. As public transport stops at midnight during the week and night buses only run once an hour at the weekends, it is a lot easier to get home if you live centrally.

Getting around

The public transport in Lyon is absolutely fantastic. When you arrive in Lyon, I advise going straight to a TCL office to purchase a travel card (make sure you bring some ID and your student card to get the correct tariff). From this you will be able to purchase a monthly '*abonnement*' which allows you to travel on all modes of public transport in Lyon e.g. the metro, buses and trams. It does not include travel on trains but I never needed to use a train for the time I was there.

If you have some free time and plan to explore the areas around Lyon, the cheapest mode of transport is generally by bus. Depending on how far in advance you book, it is possible to get to most cities and towns outside of Lyon for a reasonable price. For example, I was able to visit Turin for a weekend by taking the bus for 20€ return.

Hospital Placements

Neurologie – Service de neurologie fonctionnelle et épileptologie

The ward

Although there are neurology wards in hospitals in Manchester, there is an entire hospital dedicated to neurological conditions which forms part of the "*Groupe Hospitalier Est*". Within this group there are several different specialised hospital blocks which provide care to patients throughout Lyon and the surrounding neighbourhoods. My first placement, or "*stage*", was in the service de neurologie fonctionnelle et épileptologie. As the name would suggest, the "*épileptologie*" part of the ward provides treatment for patients suffering from epilepsy, whether it is newly diagnosed patients or patients that are experiencing ongoing seizures. The "*neurologie fonctionnelle*" part of the service is concerned with functional imaging such as EEGs and provoked potentials. This meant there was a variety of illness such as MS, subdural haematomas, general confusion and, of course, epilepsy.

First impressions on Day 1

One thing that was immediately different from England was the dress code of the doctors. In France it is perfectly acceptable to wear jeans and a t-shirt to placement as long as you wear your "*chemise blanche*" i.e. white coat. From talking to the other Erasmus students, the UK seems to be one of the few places in Europe that doesn't use white coats anymore. I must admit, I felt like a child dressing up as a doctor for the first few times I wore mine! Although I did not have my own blouse there are normally plenty of spares in each of the wards.

Structure of the ward

Each morning there was the "*relève*" at 9am, where the nurses handed over important information for each of the patients that occurred during the night e.g. if a patient had seizures, falls, new onset confusion. This would normally last for around 1 hour

after which the ward round, or “*le tour*” would commence which would normally last until lunch at 13h00. Luckily there was another Erasmus student on my placement, which gave me the opportunity to practice my French slowly and without worrying about making mistakes as although the service had interesting patients and the staff were very nice, the first few weeks of ward rounds were incredibly challenging for me from a language perspective. I found myself focusing a lot more on being able to understand what the doctors were actually saying rather than learning medicine.

After lunch, which usually takes 45mins to an hour (there’s no such thing as grabbing a quick sandwich in France), we had the opportunity to clerk new arrivals on the ward with the other students. It was a good chance to speak French with the patients and to practice my consultation skills, however there was a lot of waiting around for patients to arrival which meant that I usually finished at 18h. I found that the worst part of all the placements has been waiting for something to do.

Every Thursday morning on the ward there was student teaching, where the medical student had to present a clinical case from the previous week. As well as presenting the patient (i.e. presenting complaint, medical history etc.), they also had to explain the illness and ask questions to the other students. After the presentation, the “*docteur*”, (which is basically the registrar/consultant of the ward) would provide feedback and discuss the illness with the group. During my third week of the placement I had to present a case of epilepsy with two other French students. It was quite daunting at the start, but as there were three of us it meant I didn’t have too much to do on my own. Although it was nerve-wracking, it was good to know that the other student and doctors could actually understand my French.

Interesting points about the ward

In some ways the French medical students have a lot of independence with regards to completing practical skills. For example, I assisted a 3rd year medical student with a salivary gland biopsy. I was also able to perform a lumbar puncture for the first time on my own (with supervision from the registrar). I discovered that if you successfully perform a lumbar puncture on the ward, you have to bake a cake and bring it to the ward the next day. It seems strange, but it was actually really nice for the morale of the ward and it was always a talking point for the group. I found this rule quite difficult as I didn’t have an oven in my halls, but everyone was happy enough with my shop-bought brownies.

Dermatologie (Hôpital Edouard Herriot, Lyon) – Service de dermatologie, vénéréologie, allergologie, dermatologie esthétique

The service

Although the whole title of the service deals with rheumatology and sexual health, I was part of the dermatology team and so did not experience these. The service consists of outpatient appointments (“*les consultations/consults*”) and an ambulatory service where patients attend to receive specialised treatments for the morning or afternoon.

Structure of the ward

There were about 10 other medical students on this placement and so we had a rota ('le planning') where we each signed up for different clinics to avoid clashing with each other. Unlike neurology which involved us being present the whole day to clerk new patients, there were a lot of half-days in Dermatology (mostly because there were so many of us). On Monday afternoons and Friday mornings I was with Dr DUCROUX, who runs a specialist clinic for transplanted patients. My dissertation for my Masters in Virology was about skin cancers in immunosuppressed patients following kidney transplants so it was really interesting to see how skin surveillance was carried out clinically.

Interesting points about the ward

The consultant would move between two rooms with a medical student or intern in each to see patients, much like in the UK. This gave me the opportunity to conduct consultations on my own and perform a dermatology examination before the consultant arrived to review the patients. At the start it was incredibly daunting, but the patients were very understanding and within an hour it was much easier. At the end of the placement the students had to create a presentation on dermatological condition in preparation for their finals exam which I was able to participate in. In fact, they wanted me to write the questions in English as part of their course involves reading and understanding scientific articles in English.

Service de psychopathologie du développement

The service

This ward was a short-stay ward that technically admits children from 3 months to 18 years old. However, in reality the vast majority of the patients were teenage girls who are normally admitted from the Emergency Department. The typical conditions in this ward were depression, intentional overdoses, anxiety, eating disorders and educational problems such as truancy.

Structure of the ward

In the morning there was a multidisciplinary team meeting to discuss all aspects of patient care. This included social workers, nurses, educators, doctors, health-care assistants and psychologists. Interestingly they did not have ward round in the morning, but instead conducted interviews with patients either individually or with their families which continued throughout the day. In between these interviews the doctors may have been called to the ED to assess patients that presented in crisis to determine if they needed admission.

Interesting points about the ward

The clinical cases were very interesting, although they could be quite emotionally challenging and sad in some instances, especially with regards to child abuse. In addition, the language of adolescents was a lot more challenging to understand compared to other patients as young patients tend to use more slang and speak quickly. However, it was a good opportunity to experience all aspects of the French language, rather than formal medical language.

At the start of my placement in Neurology I found it very difficult to understand most of what was happening. I think this was because I intercalated between 4th and 5th year and did have French lessons during this time. As a result, I hadn't spoken French for about 2 years. However as intimidating as it was at the start I feel like I improved a lot in the first month, mainly from being completely immersed in the language from the beginning. I would definitely recommend doing consultations with patients as soon as you can in placements, as they are the best way to improve your language skills. The patients are very accommodating and as long as you explain where you are from and why you're on placement.

Inter-cultural understanding

Before coming to Lyon, I received an email asking if I wanted to attend French classes in addition to placements. I was about to decline, thinking that I would be able to learn French during placements but decided it would be good to refresh my grammar and general vocabulary. As it turns out, it was the best decision I made as during these classes I was able to make friends with the other Erasmus students. This was particularly good because the French students were so busy with studies that they didn't have much free time to do things after placement.

The other Erasmus students were from a huge range of countries including: Italy; Slovenia; Macedonia; Greece; Portugal and Germany. It was a really interesting group and it allowed me to learn about other cultures, particularly Macedonian and Greek cultures that I had never even thought about before. For example, during the Eurovision song contest we all got together and talked about politics and traditions in our home countries which was really enlightening. What struck me the most about the group was how similar we were despite coming from a range of countries and backgrounds. We all had very similar beliefs and humour, which really surprised me. I hope to see some of the other Erasmus students again in the future. It also means I will have free accommodation in lots of beautiful cities!

Future plans

Although France is very different from the UK in a number of ways regarding healthcare, the quality of care that the French patients receive is excellent. There is a real sense of comradeship among the doctors, perhaps because they work long hours together. However, I don't think I would like to work there as a junior doctor. They work incredibly hard and get paid a lot less than in the UK (about 12,000€ a year at the start), despite Lyon having quite a high cost of living. However, I would definitely consider coming back as a consultant, providing that my language skills haven't disappeared by then!

Useful information

- <http://www.tcl.fr/Tarifs/S-abonner/Pour-tous>: information about the different types of tariffs for travel around Lyon
- <https://www.crous-lyon.fr/logements/>: the official CROUS website to look for university accommodation
- <https://www.petitpaume.com/>: A great website for keeping up to date with the many things that will be happening in Lyon

Summary

Although it will be daunting at first, you will surprise yourself at how quickly you improve your language skills within the first few weeks. My advice would be to immerse yourself in

the culture, and definitely try to make friends with other Erasmus students, as it was honestly the most enriching thing I could have done. The 16 weeks will fly by, and you won't want to leave by the end, I certainly didn't.

Good luck with the rest of your studies, and remember, *il faut profiter!*