

Berlin placement report



Potsdamer platz



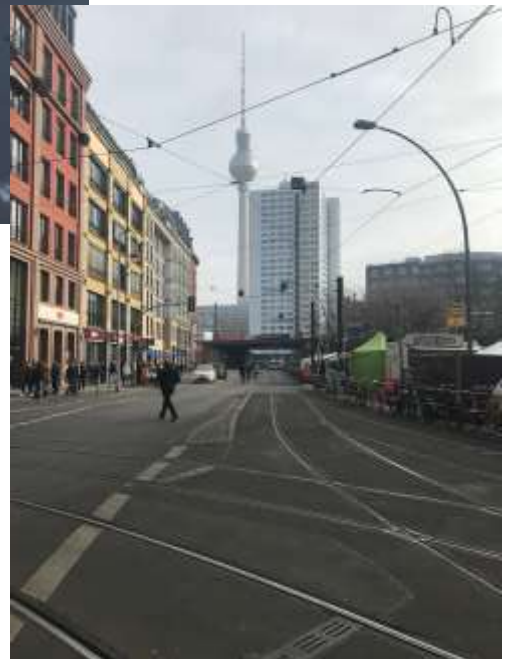
Botanical gardens



East side gallery



Bundesplatz (commute home)



Hackescher Markt

Why I chose to study on the ES programme

I really wanted to continue speaking German and improve in terms of grammar and writing. I was born in Vienna and grew up there, therefore German was my first language but my parents are from Nigeria. This meant at home their mother tongue, which is Yoruba, was spoken. After, moving to the UK and having to learn English I really didn't want to forget German and get really bad at it. Therefore, I did the GCSE and A Level in order to stay connected to the language. I was also very happy when I found out it was possible to attend German classes alongside my medical degree. I thought it would be great to have this additional qualification that is only possible to obtain from Manchester. Furthermore, I felt it would open more doors for me, as we sat recognised exams and in addition we would graduate with ES studies. Moreover, I have the option to work in a German speaking country and also it would look good on job applications. Lastly, it was nice to know I would get to a level where I'm able to speak another language in a hospital setting, where I'll interact with doctors and patients.

What have I learned and gained from the experience

It has been interesting to see how different a system can be from one European country to another. I have had a rotation in three of their campuses, therefore will compare these further later on. I've also had two medical and two surgical placements.

One of the main things I would say is there is a clear hierarchy and the way you would approach and talk to seniors is completely different. You have to be really respectful and as a student in most cases you won't really be talking to the consultant that much. In the UK I would say they were generally more approachable and I was more willing to ask them questions.

Furthermore, job roles of the healthcare professionals differed. In my hospital there were no healthcare assistants, ward clerks or phlebotomists. Therefore, nurses had to take on the role of the first two and medical students of the latter. If there were no students on the ward, it then falls on the doctors.

It is definitely a system that does depend on its students as it eases the work load of the junior doctors. In the UK I'm used to not being expected to do much in terms of ward work except in some cases. Therefore, it didn't make much of a difference to the ward whether you're there or not. However, in Germany I was expected to take all the bloods and do the cannulas. I would also clerk new patients, hand them over to the doctors and document findings. Additional jobs varied depending on the type of placement. For example, on cardiology I was also responsible for prepping patients for cardioversions and carrying them out under a doctor's supervision. As a student you feel a part of the team and that your work is making a difference. This does mean that you are working more than observing and are usually you there for the whole day.

In terms of the patients, I would say they really respected the doctors and in most cases would just go with whatever the doctor says. If a doctor asked what they would want it can be seen as them not being competent and they would just like them to take charge. Also,

doctors are blunter and straight to the point. On my first placement, I liked to be observed doing most things just to make sure I was doing things right. A junior doctor watched me clerk a new patient and from the feedback I got I was apparently too polite.

I've taken a lot away from this experience and I'm really grateful for the opportunity. It has really helped me improve on my clinical skills in time for FY1. Also, it has given me a taste of truly working alongside healthcare professionals and being involved in patient care. It has increased my confidence, in terms of being more responsible for patients. Before clerking new patients, I would try and find out everything about them. I would read the A&E report, look at previous scans, blood results, admissions etc. I know this will all help me for foundation years.

I would say it is definitely up to you to make the most of your placements. It can be difficult, especially at the start when you're finding your feet but it is important to write down and ask as many questions as you can.

Practical Information

Things to do before you arrive

Once you're allocated to Berlin, the language department will contact the Berlin Erasmus team and make them aware of the students that will be coming. They will ask you to do an online language assessment and complete a learning agreement. You have to get around 60% to pass the test. If you don't pass you may need to attend extra language classes. In the learning agreement, you state the four specialities you want to do a rotation in and need to get it signed by language department. They also ask you to send over a transcript of records.

Organise your clinical placements

The Erasmus team will organise your first placement for you but you have to organise the remaining three yourself. You can apply to any of the Charité campuses (main ones are Mitte, Virchow and Benjamin Franklin) and there are also Vivantes hospitals you can apply to. The best thing is to go on the Charite website, where you can search for different departments at all their campuses. Through that you can get contact details for their secretaries. If I remember correctly they had an email template on the Charité blackboard (you will get log-in details sent out). It's good to attach a CV with a picture but not necessary. It's best to organise your placements as soon as possible, as places can fill up quickly, especially for popular sites (Mitte, Virchow) and popular placements (Paeds, A&E etc.) I started sending out emails around September.

Immunisation form

The ES team should send you an Immunisation form to complete which needs to be sent to their Betriebsarzt. This including semester fee payment was expected to be done by early December. This is all explained again in the 'Erste Infos' document you should receive. The only thing we all didn't have was the Hepatitis C antibody test. So, we all booked in with occupational health to get this done.

Attend pre-departure talks

It is compulsory to attend two pre-departure talks, where you'll get to know about some important deadlines and forms to complete on 'my placement'. They will also explain the process of getting your MasterCard. The talks happen around November time.

Familiarise yourself with 'my placement'

This is the portal you'll be using to upload anything to do with your travels. This includes another Learning agreement sent out by our university, a grant agreement (when applying for funding) and your arrival forms and departure forms etc.

Find a place to live

Unfortunately, this can be difficult in Berlin. It is best to start looking as early as possible. Hospital accommodation isn't available and it can be difficult to get student accommodation. You can use this website <https://www.wg-gesucht.de/> to look for a place. It is also worth joining the Erasmus Berlin group on facebook to see if anyone posts about available rooms. You can also check Airbnb or wimdu. Three of us were lucky to find a flat on Airbnb that we could stay in for our entire stay in Berlin. We lived in Neukölln which is a cool area, where families live with good transport links. You also have Tempelhof nearby which is a great place for picnics and barbecues when the suns out and a good place for a walk or run. There are many cafes and places to eat. Other areas are Kreuzberg, Friedrichshain, Prenzlauerberg and Charlottenburg. Kreuzberg and Friedrichshain are cool, hipster areas with plenty bars and restaurants. They are popular areas for nights out. Prenzlauerberg and Charlottenburg are quieter, nicer areas and therefore can be pricier. The most important thing is to find somewhere with good transport links (u-bahn stop). It's best to find a place before you fly out there, as it will save you so much stress!

Apply for Erasmus funding

An email will be sent out telling you how to go about this. The total amount is around 900 or 1,200 euros (if lower income) which is paid out in two instalments. You receive 80% of this around 2 weeks after you arrive and the rest when you're back. This is all paid onto the MasterCard you'll receive from the university. Beware that every time you take money out of the card you'll be charged around 3 euros. So, its best to take large amount out at once or to use it to pay in stores which is free. Also, make sure to bring enough cash to tide you over before you receive the bursary payment. P.s you can't use the MasterCard to make bank transfers, for example to pay your semester fees or set up direct debits (I needed to do this for the gym).

Make an appointment at the Bürgeramt

Make sure to do this a couple of months before of your arrival. Appointments go very quickly. You should book an appointment for the first week you arrive. Here is the website: <https://service.berlin.de/dienstleistung/120686/> What you want to do basically is 'Anmeldung einer Wohnung'. On their website it states all the documents they need you to bring, so read this careful as they can be strict about this. You can select any Bürgeramt, just pick one not too far from the centre or where you live (if you've already found a place). Apparently, if you're staying in Berlin for more than 3 months it needs to be done. To be

honest it was only really useful if you're planning on opening a bank account or joining a gym.

Pay your Charité semester fees

The ES team will let you know the amount you need to pay for the winter semester. In the 'Erste Infos' document it will tell you their account details. Make sure to do this before the deadline, otherwise you'll have to pay a 20 euro fee. I think for us it was around 150ish for the Winter Semester. You then will get another email later on in the semester telling you to pay for the Summer semester. This was a higher amount around 250ish. You can claim some of this back as you leave before the summer semester ends. It is annoying having to pay these extra fees to the university but the good thing is it covers your transport for while you're in Berlin. You'll get a student card/transport card which is valid for all the zones (ABC).

Complete the online language assessment

In our year, we had to complete an additional OLS language assessment before we left and when we got back. This was to see if we improved our language skills and it was compulsory for us to do in order to get our bursary.

On arrival

Opening a bank account

This is optional and many banks offer free student accounts (deutsche bank, Sparkasse). You need to bring your passport, studentcard and the sheet you get from registering your flat. You could just use your English bank account to take money out, which I did but you will be paying international charges each time you take money out. Either way I thought you'll be paying charges because you'd still need to get money over into the German account as well. A clever thing you could do is take all the money out from your MasterCard and put it onto your German card.

German sim card

Luckily, with this whole new use your data abroad thing, we were able to use our phones as normal. However, if this is not possible next year then you can just get a pay-as-you-go sim card with monthly bundles. I know there is Lyca mobile and Aldi also provide sim cards.

Matriculation

You'll need to book an appointment with one of the ladies from the Erasmus team. This will take place in the week you arrive. They will tell you what you need to bring. This includes passport, EHIC card (original plus copies) and a receipt showing confirmation of semester fee payment. Also, make sure to print off the 'certificate of arrival form' on my placement and take this along to your appointment for them to fill in.

They will then give you information on where to go for matriculation and what you need to take with you.

Erasmus students

As previously mentioned, join the Erasmus Berlin facebook group to find out what events are going on. It is a good way to meet more people. Unfortunately, they didn't really start doing anything until towards the end of our time there, this is because we apparently start at an awkward time in the semester when they go on holiday.

Clinical placements

Overview

Forms

On the Charité blackboard you will find a form titled 'certificate of clinical rotation for Erasmus students'. This needs to be filled in at the end of each placement and signed by a doctor. You also need to get them to fill in an eform at the end of each placement.

White coats, scrubs and what to pack!

So, doctors in Germany wear white coats and dress casually. If you still have your lab coat, you can take this along with you. However, at Mitte, Virchow and Benjamin Franklin I got a white coat from their Wäscheausgabe. The secretary provided me with a sheet to take there. You can change it whenever it gets dirty and just need to make sure you return it at the end of your placement. You don't need to dress smartly as you do in the UK. You can wear jeans and a casual top. I would recommend packing many short sleeves as it can get quite warm under the Kittel.

I ended up wearing scrubs on all my placements. On surgical placements you're going to be wearing scrubs and on some medical wards the doctors also choose to wear scrubs. It's not compulsory on the medical wards but I just asked the doctors, as it's a lot more comfortable and they were happy for me to wear them.

Also, you can wear trainers to hospital. I would recommend bringing a spare set that you can leave in hospital, this is what all the other students and doctors did.

A typical day's work

Starting times are earlier than in the UK. Surgical placements start around 7/7.30 am and medical placements around 7.30/8 am. Germans tend to be punctual and you're expected to be there on time for the whole day. Finishing times vary, this can range from 2ish/3pm (usually surgical placements) to 5/6pm (medical placements).

Students on the ward

There are PJ's (Praktisches Jahr) and Famulants. PJ's are in their final year (6th Year) of medical school. I would say they are somewhere in between a final year medical student and an FY1. They are doing an unpaid one year long clinical placement. They rotate every 4 months. PJ's get something known as a Studientag once a week (a day off basically). Famulants are medical students from the years below doing a 30-day placement. PJ's go straight into speciality training after graduating.

UPSAs/UCEXs/UCMDs

The easiest thing is just to get them done before you leave. It's just one less thing to worry about. It is possible to get them done in Berlin if you don't manage to get them all signed off. Just make sure to plan in advance and ask doctors that seem reliable.

SAP

This is the hospital computer system. I was told by the secretaries on my first two placements that only PJ's get a log in as their placements are longer. However, you can get access! Go on the Charité website and search for SAP antrag. This is a form you need to fill out and get one of the doctors to sign and it explains where you need to fax it to. You just need to remember your Charité email address which you get after matriculation. Having a log in on my last two placements made a huge difference. I got to know the patients much better as I had access to their notes and was able to order investigations.

FOOD

On your first day, I would recommend always bringing a pack lunch, to see what your ward is like. Some wards/specialities don't have a lunch break. At Virchow, they don't tend to go for lunch. At Mitte and Benjamin Franklin we did.

General surgery

This included a whole host of things: Vascular surgery, Thoracic surgery, HPB surgery and bariatric surgery. I was at Mitte for this placement. I started at 7.30am and finished around 2.30pm. The students on my ward went down for lunch together at the Mensa. This was a very busy placement, where I was mainly taking bloods and helping clerk new patients. There were 10 other students (PJ's). This worked fine as you could do a morning shift (times stated above) or an afternoon shift from 2pm till around 7pm. The PJ's didn't like this placement as they felt they didn't learn anything. I would agree it is difficult as the doctors are very busy. Also, I didn't know much about the patients as ward rounds were very quick and they wouldn't stop to explain things to you. However, you can go down into surgery and see a range of procedures. For example, I saw them use the Da Vinci robot for thymectomies. I would say this is a pretty laid-back placement where you do finish on time, unless you're stuck in theatre. It's worth mentioning that in their theatres, if you are scrubbed in, then you're usually going to be holding retractors for them. The students on my ward were lovely and were happy to show me everything and explain things. They also had socials usually once a week.

Cardiology

I was at Benjamin Franklin for this placement. They have a large team there with several wards. I was on the arrhythmia ward and the doctors were nice. Most of our patients had AF, atrial flutter, were getting a pacemaker or ablation or had heart failure. I got there just before 8am so I could get changed before the Frühbesprechung which started at 8am on the dot. After this I would start on taking bloods. Later on I would join the ward round. There were usually only two/three doctors on my ward so it was easy to follow them around and ask questions. We frequently had cardioversions. I was responsible for prepping patients for these. I felt like I was part of the team and that my work was really contributing to patient care and easing some of the workload. It was just me and another Famulant which meant

there was the right amount of work for us to do. The more cardioversions I had done the more I got to take charge from start to finish. From putting the patient to sleep to their recovery time. I also had the opportunity to use the ultrasound machine on the ward to scan patients for mainly pleural effusions and ascites. The doctor helped me gain a basic understanding of how to do this. I would also assist draining the ascitic fluid if present. There were many ECGs to do, so you get really good at this and you can always ask the doctors to go through them with you. I really enjoyed this placement as I was given more responsibility. I was mainly based on the ward as they needed us there. It was hard for them to see us leave as what we did helped them out a lot. We would go down for lunch together. In the afternoon, we would also clerk new patients. There is also the opportunity to go down to the cathlab, see echos being done and to sprechstunde (clinics). I usually finished around 4.30pm.

Respiratory medicine

I was at Benjamin Franklin again and I must say the team there is amazing. I really felt welcomed and the consultant was lovely, approachable and very keen to teach. However, when I was there this was a very busy placement and one were the doctors really relied on me and the other student. I was usually there for 10-12 hours. The doctors on the ward were new and there was only two of them, therefore they were also understaffed. So, I believe this part will change as they were expecting a new colleague and as they become more experienced. We mainly had lung cancer patients, pneumonia, pleural effusions and COPD patients. Anyway, this placement definitely pushed me out of my comfort zone got me doing more of what I needed more experience in. I would get there at 7.30am to start taking some of the bloods before our morning department meeting at 8am. I always used to find these boring, as I wasn't able to follow what was going on most of the time. However, as I became more involved in this placement and knew the patients, they became more interesting. I was also more interested in the new patients coming, as I would be clerking one of them. Sometime after our morning meeting, we would start with the ward round. I was keen on learning more about each patient and we were encouraged to listen to the chest with the doctors to pick up any signs. This was really good practice. However, on many occasions during the ward round we would be asked to complete jobs such as blood cultures if we discover someone's spiking a temperature or take urgent bloods. This made it difficult to follow what was going on with each patient. However, they were always happy to answer any questions and explain things to me. Later in the early afternoon, we would clerk new patients. At first I was doing this with the other student and later by myself. We would also be expected to document our findings in the patient's discharge letter and present the patient to the consultant during our afternoon board round. This is where we sat around computers with the consultant and discussed each patient. We looked at their scans, blood results, notes and then discussed what should happen next in their care. I liked how they gave us responsibility for the patient we clerked, such as ordering investigations for them, writing in their notes and updating the patient during ward rounds. I was able to get access to the computer system which really helped me to learn about each patient in more detail. This was a really good placement because they really got us involved. You can also go down to Bronchoscopy and Sprechstunde if it's not too busy.

Cardiac surgery

I was a Virchow for this placement and I really enjoyed it. The surgeons on the ward were really nice, I got on with them really well which makes a huge difference. This meant when I went down into surgery they were keen to teach me and involve me. I would start at 7.30am and finish around 3pm. I was the only student on the ward and that was perfect as it isn't a busy placement. This meant on most days there was enough work for me to do. I would start my day by taking bloods and then I would follow the doctors on the ward round. On surgical ward rounds in addition to the usual stuff, you also check surgical wounds and change dressings. However, if I wanted to go into theatre in the morning, I would just go straight after taking bloods. Again, I had access to the computer system so I was able to check the OP list. I would usually then just go down with one of the surgeons on the list. As a student during a CABG you get to assist harvesting the saphenous vein and closing the leg yourself. Also, it's just interesting to get to see some open-heart surgery. In the afternoon, I was responsible for clerking all the new patients. Once, I've done that I would present them to the doctor. I got to hear so many murmurs which was a good experience. Some days were slow and there wasn't much to do, which meant you could spend more time in theatre or just ask for some teaching. They also have an ICU and intermediate care ward so I'm sure you could just ask to spend a day there to see what they do. That's something I wish I had done.

Enjoying the city

Touristy things

Visit:

- **Museum Island:** walk around the Dom and there are many nice museums including the DDR museum
- **Bradenburg Tor:** also visit at night to see it lit up
- **Reichstag:** you can go up it for free if you book in advance
- **Jewish memorial:** there is also a free museum underneath
- **East side Gallery:** longest remaining section of the Berlin wall with cool graffiti
- Sunday Flea market at Mauerpark: when it's warmer they have karaoke sessions
- **Victory column:** you can go up for free and get a great view of Tiergarten
- **Tiergarten:** when it's warmer, they open a Biergarten (Café am neuen See) by the lake. It's a lovely place to relax on a sunny day and you can rent a little boat I believe.
- **Tempelhof:** have a picnic/barbecue, go for a run/stroll or visit the Biergarten
- **Fernsehturm:** we celebrated up there on our last day of placements
- **Wannsee:** lovely place to visit on a sunny day, you can visit the beach there and go for walks
- **Potsdam:** This is a beautiful area with impressive palaces and grounds, not far away
- **Berlin Zoo:** I had a nice time at the zoo. There's a lot to see
- **Botanical Gardens**

Areas:

- **Alexanderplatz:** a great place for shopping

- **Hackescher markt:** Lovely area to walk around, many shops, restaurants, interesting boutiques and they have a market
- **Potsdamer platz:** Tall buildings, more shopping and visit the Sony centre, maybe watch an IMAX movie.
- **Friedrichshain:** cool bars and restaurants, hipster area with graffiti, well worth a visit

Food & drinks:

- **Monkey bar** – great views, you can see the zoo too!
- **Klunkerkranich** – rooftop bar
- **Burgermeister** – delicious burgers
- **Silo Coffee**
- **From Hanoi with love** – cheap and delicious!
- **Que pasa**
- **Zeit für Brot** – you have to try their cinnamon buns!

Nearby Cities

- Prague is a coach journey away! Around 4 hours, I really enjoyed my time there.

Leaving Berlin

Appointments:

Make sure to make an appointment with the Erasmus team to give them your famulatur certificates and to get your attendance certificate signed (find this on my placement).

You also then need to 'Abmelde' before you leave. So, you can book another appointment to do this. What I did find out is that the Bürgeramt in Neukölln didn't require an appointment and it wasn't really busy, so I didn't end up booking one with them and just went there in the last week.

Once you're back you will need to the language test again, complete a couple of surveys on my placement and write the report.