

# European Studies Placement Report 2017-18

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Universidad Complutense de Madrid



## Why European Studies?

For me, choosing the European Studies option was easy. Before starting Medicine I completed a degree in Hispanic Studies (Spanish and Catalan) at The University of Sheffield. During this time I spent a year in Mallorca working as a language assistant in two secondary schools. This was an incredible experience, and I leapt at the chance to try to maintain my language abilities (albeit only in one of my two languages).

Another lesser reason for choosing European Studies was that it removed a large aspect of the organisation of the elective. I felt that final year would be stressful enough for me without adding in the requirements to arrange something potentially the other side of the world, especially after hearing some horror stories from friends in previous years, so removal of some of that responsibility was very welcome. I also have to add that, despite my being super disorganised, the European Studies team were amazing in helping to smooth through everything for me.

## Why Madrid?

There were two primary reasons for me choosing Madrid over Granada. The first for me was that, having spent a year in Mallorca, I was very aware of how cold the “hot” areas of Spain can get during the winter months. In Mallorca everything was set up to deal with making the rooms cool during summer - tiled floors, high ceilings, no central heating, single glazing (if that) - and that made the winter months VERY cold. Combine that with the strong winds coming off the sea and my overarching memory of February in Mallorca was sleeping in sweatpants and a hoody. I had no desire to repeat that in Granada.

A minor reason was also that in our Y4 Spanish class there was a group of three very close friends who all wanted to go to Granada, where there were only three places. I had no desire to “break up the band”, so going to Madrid was settled for me.

## Why Complutense?

There were three universities in Madrid for us to choose from, but for me Complutense was the one that caught my eye. It seemed to be the most modern of the three and the facilities and options available for us at the university were extensive. It also had a number of great hospitals available within the program.

While it wasn't a major consideration, I also liked the idea of being part of a true campus university – the university itself is pretty self-contained, and I was interested to see how the atmosphere might be different to that of a more integrated campus like Manchester's.

## Accommodation

I arrived in Madrid fresh off the back of exempting exams with five days to find somewhere to live. There were three of us in Madrid, and none of us had organised anywhere before heading over, although I am aware that a number of people in other cities had all of theirs sorted out before going over. My main goals were to find somewhere that was out of the very centre of the city - which was a bit too touristy for me to want to live there full-time – that was well linked transport-wise, especially for my journey to my hospital, and preferably where I would be sharing with native Spanish speakers. Madrid makes it very easy for you to find somewhere to live, with a great number of websites and other services that you can use. I didn't look

into university accommodation, but I did explore options which were directed at international students, eventually deciding against them.

In the end I found my flat on an app called Badi. Badi is almost like Tinder for roommates. You create a profile selling yourself as a potential tenant, and then you can reach out to other people on the app who are advertising rooms with their own profiles. It's a good way to get to know a bit about your potential flatmates beforehand, and if you're looking for long-term accommodation it can help you find someone with similar interests to you. It also shows the locations of the flats on a map, so you can narrow down your search areas easily. It was pretty common for me to see amazing looking flats for reasonable rents, but then on looking closer to discover that they were completely the other side of the city, or even out in Barajas, near the airport.

Most people that I met at Complutense seemed to live in the north of the cities, especially in the Chamberí and Tetuán areas. Malasaña is another popular area – similar in aesthetic to Manchester's Northern Quarter, but equally with slightly higher rents, and Moncloa is the unofficial student district, given its close proximity to the Complutense campus. One thing worth mentioning however is that anywhere close to a Metro station is desirable, and that covers most of the city. I ended up living in Tetuán, between Metro stations Cuzco (Line 10) and Valdeacederas (Line 1), which pretty much gave me the run of the city.

The flat itself was a six bedroom flat with two couples and four (including myself) singletons. One of the couples were Polish architecture students who were much more comfortable speaking English, and the rest were Spanish, with whom I mainly spoke in Spanish. I ended up paying €550 a month, which was towards the higher end of the €350-€550 that most people seemed to be paying in the city.

### The Experience – The City

Madrid is a beautiful, cosmopolitan city which has something to offer everyone, both the things that you find in the guidebooks, and the things you find entirely by accident. Obviously, Madrid is well known for its art galleries, and has three of the biggest in Spain – Museo Nacional del Prado, Museo Nacional Centre de Arte Reina Sofía and Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza. The Prado is the classical art museum, and the one at which I spent the most time (four trips over four months). While the whole museum is worth seeing, if you're on a limited timeframe I tend to seek out the Goya Black Paintings, Hieronymus Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights*, and the Mariano Fortuny room, which has a number of his pieces, including *The Painter's Children in the Japanese Room* and *The Garden of the Fortuny Residence*. The Reina Sofía is the modern art museum, and has a number of Dalí paintings including *The Great Masturbator*, and Picasso's *Guernica*. The Thyssen Bornemisza is a bit more eclectic in its collection, but has a number of great pieces running from classical art right up to the modern day. The city also offers a number of smaller galleries and exhibitions, some of which are definitely better than others.

The Madrid nightlife is also great. There are bars on every corner, and most of them are open until at least 0100 every day. The centre, especially around Malaspina, is the best place to spend the evening with people of university and just after kinds of ages, and if you fancy an "early" night, the metro runs until 0130, starting up again just after 0600 for those who want to stay out a bit later. Drinks are usually pretty reasonable, especially if you're drinking Spanish beer (especially Mahou, which is brewed in Madrid). The culture is different to that often found in England, however – drinking is less about getting drunk and more about the journey and the time spent with friends. There's also a massive amount of live music (Moby Dick in Tetuán being a great smaller venue), and nightclubs like Kapital for those more dance-inclined.

Transport in Madrid is sensational. The Metro goes pretty much anywhere you might need to go, and runs from around 0600 until about 0130. The city offers monthly passes – the abono – which allow you unlimited travel around the city. For those under 26, it's only €20 a month. For those like me who are a little older, it's just over €50 a month, with the option to simply buy ten journey tickets for around €12. For the hours that the metro isn't running the city also runs night buses regularly.

It's not right to talk about Madrid without talking about food. Madrid brings together food from all over Spain and indeed all over the world, but there are some real hidden gems. Taberna Malaspina, about five minutes' walk from Sol, is a tiny cramped bar that serves some of the best Spanish food I ate (and ate and ate) while I was there. Sumo Fuzion, on Gran Via, was an incredible Japanese/Asian Fusion restaurant that did an all-you-can-eat that we drooled over. Mercado de San Antón (not the more well-known Mercado de San Miguel) served up amazing simple food of all sorts of Spanish and Mediterranean varieties. And there were hundreds more places that served up great food. Madrid, as with all of Spain, isn't perfect for vegetarians – expect to eat a lot of tortilla Española if you're heading there as a veggie – but it's certainly better than experiences I've had in other parts of Spain. The supermarkets are amazing, with cheap fresh produce and amazing meat and fish selections, but if you're cooking anything more exotic than Italian food you might find yourself having to make a trip across the city to a specialist store for spices or other ingredients – the supermarkets are very much set up for Spanish cuisine over any others.

There are also a number of day trips that you can make out from Madrid really easily. Toledo is about an hour away. I went a couple of times to Toledo, which is about an hour away by bus from Plaza Elíptica (and free with the under-26 abono) and is a really nice day out. It's an old town with a really interesting history, and a lot of places that are either really cheap or free to get into. It also has great food – the carcamusas (a pork stew) and venado a la plancha are amazing (I highly recommend the Palacios Restaurant in the centre of the town, although you might have a bit of a wait for a table!), and it's also known for its mazapanes. Friends of mine also took trips to Segovia and Ávila, although I didn't get the chance.

### The Experience – The University

Complutense is a beautiful campus university with a long history, but I didn't actually spend a great deal of time on campus, spending almost all of my time at the hospital. The University has its own Metro stop – Ciudad Universitaria – which is conveniently right in front of the medical school building. The Casa de Estudiantes, where the inductions are held and is the information equivalent of the Student's Union back home, is also right by the metro station. There are libraries across campus which I never used but am told are wonderful, and a number of other facilities. In a very Spanish style, the student cafes also sell beer and wine.

The Erasmus office at the medical school were incredibly helpful at the start and end. They do run limited hours – 1000-1400 every day – and occasionally you might have to wait for a signature from the head of the office, but even with my late application everything was sorted out incredibly quickly.

For me, however, the best aspect of the university was the ESN – Erasmus Student Network – team. As Erasmus students we're entitled to all of the benefits that the programme offers (with a caveat that that might change with Brexit) and they offered an amazing programme of events. There were weekly Tandem (language exchange) nights and salsa classes, which I admittedly didn't take part in but many of my friends did, as well as at least one extra event each week, ranging from classes – I took a Spanish cooking class, for

instance – and visits to local landmarks like the Palacio Real, right the way up to trips across the peninsula to Barcelona, Seville and even Porto. They were also really helpful whenever we had questions about life in Madrid. I made a number of really good friends through Erasmus, and it definitely made my experience in Madrid better.

### The Experience – The Hospital

My placements all took place in Hospital Clínico San Carlos – known locally as “El Clínico” – which is a large and comprehensive hospital not far from the Complutense campus. I had four placements during my time there – Anaesthetics, Cardiology, Paediatrics and Geriatrics.

It would be sensible, I think, to expect most aspects of healthcare to be identical between more economically developed countries, especially when discounting the specifics of private healthcare. However, I was surprised to find a number of differences in various different areas.

One of the biggest aspects of the job of a doctor is communication, both with patients and with colleagues. This is obviously something that Manchester places a great amount of emphasis on, although speaking to friends I am aware that this is not an area of focus at some other UK medical schools. I entered the placements confident in my Spanish-speaking abilities, but I hit a number of issues. It was noted on numerous occasions by colleagues in the hospital that my Spanish is very good, and when discussing things with colleagues I am very much able to make my points. However, I did sometimes struggle when talking to patients. Much of this was due to dialectal troubles, or the use of colloquial vocabulary as opposed to the formal medical vocabulary we've been taught – an English equivalent might be the difference between saying that someone has vomited or that someone has “puked”. What this has done was give me a real appreciation for patients in the UK who don't speak English as a first language, and the difficulties that they might face in communicating with medical professionals. There were also a number of occasions in which I spoke in Spanish to patients who didn't speak Spanish as a first language, and the difficulties in understanding each other were extremely clear.

Spain still retains a great amount of the “the doctor is always right” mentality that has mostly disappeared from the UK, and shared decision making was not common, certainly among the older patients – decisions are generally very doctor-driven. This is a different side of medicine for me, and one that I don't really appreciate. Having seen a number of consultations with patients whereby the patient has their treatment dictated, even when it is clear to me that they are unhappy with whatever decision has been made, has reaffirmed my support for shared decision making. On discussion with doctors there about addressing the obvious concerns that the patients are feeling, the consensus is generally along the lines of “We went to medical school, they didn't.”, an attitude that I found often mirrored in the older medical students.

I also found that many of the doctors are very blunt in delivering news to patients, even when that news might be upsetting. While I appreciate the need at times to be direct with a patient, having seen a doctor almost shout at a patient to stop crying when delivering bad news simply reaffirms for me the importance of appropriate communication, and especially empathy, between doctor and patient.

One aspect that I had not considered prior to going to Spain was the presence of region-specific illnesses. Toxic Oil Syndrome (Síndrome de aceite tóxico) is a disease caused by contaminated rapeseed oil in Spain in 1981, which presented with LRTI-like symptoms, progressing to thrombo-embolisms, myalgia and pulmonary hypertension, and eventually neurological symptoms, organ damage/failure and skin and

connective tissue fibrosis. Some 1100 people died and over 20,000 were affected. I examined a patient during my geriatrics placement with a number of worrying signs, but when I expressed these worries to the consultant I was reassured that the majority were long-standing, secondary to previous SAT. This made me consider that there might be a number of diseases that I am not aware of simply because they only affect specific populations, and is something to consider as a foundation year doctor (and beyond).

The doctor-student relationship was wonderful. Generally speaking each consultant has one or two residentes (junior doctors) working for them, and on each placement apart from anaesthetics I have been assigned to a particular consultant and residente. The amount of teaching I received on each placement from the juniors both between patients and at the completion of ward round was far more than with most in the UK – I've been incredibly well supported. It appears that teaching is much more ingrained in the culture of the doctors there, and that's something I greatly support.

On a more introspective note, I've had a number of opportunities in Spain that I have never had in the UK. During anaesthetics I performed a number of procedures, from common things like cannulation (which I was still a little worried about, having missed a number of them during my geriatrics placement before Christmas) to intubation and central line insertion. While I don't feel completely comfortable completing these latter procedures unsupervised I do feel much more prepared for the possibility of having to undertake these during the next two years, especially during my FY1 anaesthetics block.

All in all, I've probably gained more from my ES placement than I expected. There's no doubt that my Spanish has improved in the time that I've been here, but I've also gained insight into my own communication abilities, my practical abilities, and the attitudes towards patients, colleagues and students that I hope to take into practice next year.

For those just reading this report looking for recommendations for placements, I can't fault any of my placements, although my Anaesthetics placement with Dra Acedo was particularly wonderful. Across all placements however prepare for early starts, early-ish finishes, and for the most part, breakfast integrated into the daily timetable.

## Summary

I can't speak highly enough of Madrid, of Complutense, and of the European Studies/Erasmus programme as a whole. I highly recommend it to anyone looking at Madrid and especially HCSC to those interested in Anaesthetics or Surgery. I'll leave my details with the ES coordinators and happily answer any questions that anyone might have about my time there (or food recommendations!).