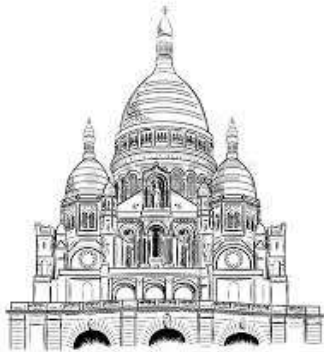


# MBChB European Studies Placement Report

**Language:** French    **City:** Paris



## Placement 1

**Service :** Anaesthetics

**Supervisor :** Professor

Bernard Cholley

*(bernard.cholley@aphp.fr)*

**Location :** Hôpital Européen

Georges Pompidou

*20 rue Leblanc, 75015 Paris*

*(15th Arrondissement ; Metro :  
Balard, line 4)*



## Placement 2

**Service :** Paediatric Plastic and  
Maxillo-Facial Surgery

**Supervisor :** Professor Arnaud  
Picard *(arnaud.picard@aphp.fr)*

**Location :** Hôpital Necker

Enfants Malades

*149 rue de Sèvres, 75015 Paris*

*(15th Arrondissement, Metro :  
Duroc, line 10)*

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## **Why I Chose the MBChB European Studies Programme**

The opportunity to study a language alongside my medical degree was one of the main factors in my choosing to apply to the MBChB Programme at Manchester. I had studied French to A-Level and had been keen to continue practising (and building on) my linguistic skills.

Furthermore, although not always *specifically* required by charitable and other organisations, a recognised qualification in medical languages enables one to travel with their vocation in Medicine with more ease and confidence. Personally, I have envisaged myself working in surgery in French-speaking Africa, as well as perhaps working on policy-making in Europe.

Admittedly, the duration of the year 5 placement abroad (4 months) was quite overwhelming in the first instance. I don't think I had quite fathomed exactly what that would entail, in terms of the volume of organisation and work required. However, I specifically remember moments of feeling very privileged to be able to spend what was effectively two elective periods (16 weeks) abroad, while most of my friends could only escape Manchester for 8 weeks. It has been quite a challenging experience, but spending that extra time here has enabled me to feel part of the cityscape, so to speak – and that is invaluable.

## **Overview : Living and Working in Paris**

*Example of monthly outgoings :*

- Rent : €499.00 (all inclusive)
- Food : €200.00
- Transport : €75.00 (Navigo pass)
- Other (eating out, tourist attractions) : €100.00 +

*Incomings will include (approximately) :*

- Salary from hospital : €200 - €300.00 (basic rate)
- Partial metro reimbursement : €15 – 30.00
- NHS bursary (if applicable) : Variable
- Erasmus grant (if applicable) : Variable

Paris very much lives up to its many stereotypes - and more. For me, I found it to be a very outwardly beautiful and creative city. The evidence of centuries of history and socio-political change literally surround you as you stroll the streets; the architecture of the buildings, the names of the roads, the contrasts in ethnicity and culture that hit you as you pass from one arrondissement to the next.

Beyond that which is impressive, though, one must be prepared also for the less aesthetically pleasing parts of what Paris can be known for. Namely, Paris is not a very clean city – it is advisable to always pay attention to where you're walking! In addition, some can find the fast-paced, blunt and almost 'flippant' nature of Parisians relatively unfriendly. Smoking in public (and very much in

private) is also still extremely common and is regarded as acceptable social behaviour.

Although living costs are dear (around €500.00 or more in student housing), it is certainly possible to live the full 'Parisian life' relatively inexpensively. One of the best parts of living in Paris is the abundance of boulangeries and patisseries, selling freshly baked goods at great prices. While not so good for the waistline, making the most of these options is a good way to save money and eat well. Similarly, if one can get used to having their coffee black and 'ristretto', as is the way to have coffee in Paris, an espresso can be as cheap as 50-70 eurocents.

Additionally, it is important to know that, as students, it is possible you will be eligible to receive a number of financial aids during your stay. For your university housing, the Caisse Aide Famille (CAF) can offer students a significant reimbursement on their rent. Personally, I attempted the process of applying for the CAF several times and after a while I decided to abandon things. Due to personal circumstances, there was question of having to hire an official legal translator to translate identity documents from English to French, amongst other bureaucratic headaches that are part and parcel of the French way of doing things. However, my example aside, I have heard rumour that some UK students have been successful and so I would highly recommend researching and preparing any potentially-necessary documentation (and translations) well ahead of time.

On a similar vein, the hospital human resources office will usually process any monthly metro pass you may purchase (the 'Navigo' pass) to commute to work. As with other French externes, the hospital will also pay you a small fee for your working time. The amount varies relative to the hospital, but is usually in the region of €200-300.00 per month for the basic timetable of working five half-days per week (and no weekends).

Finally, it is important to make the most of one's time in Paris. First to tick off the list are most certainly the vast array of museums. These are free for students under the age of 26 with a valid student card (and if you're over 26, some of the art museums will let you in for free until age 30 if you are an Arts student of some description!) Failing this, most museums are free to the public on the last Sunday of every month.

Beyond museums, the monthly metro pass (Navigo, costing around €70-80.00 per month) gives you unlimited use of underground, bus and overground (RER) trains. Many of these can take you as far out as some of the great attractions surrounding Paris, including the palaces at Fontainebleau and Versailles. You can also use it to get to Charles de Gaulle airport, without buying a separate airport ticket, should you fancy a weekend away !

## **Reflections on Placement 1**

**Good For :** Practical skills, working independently, good lifestyle

**Perhaps Not For :** Those wanting more support, building a social network, dislike of repetition

I had chosen to do my first placement in Anaesthetics relatively strategically. In many ways, this was a good choice – it was a relatively relaxed speciality and team to work in, and the work often came in dribs and drabs with a lot of time for coffee breaks. I would highly recommend the placement for anyone who would like some time to relax and enjoy exploring the city.

However, for all its merits, these same aspects of the placement were also relatively challenging – and particularly so at the start of my period in Paris in the winter. Anaesthetics is a placement that commonly welcomes externes in the French university system, thus I found myself to be the only externe in the service. This made the placement quite lonely at times – particularly from the point of view of making friends with other people my age, or going through the same thing as me. What is more, it meant it was quite difficult for me to gauge exactly when and where any teaching was taking place.

In fact, the placement really needs someone who is confident to be independent and friendly in a completely foreign situation. I would be expected to arrive and find my way on my own, find myself an anaesthetist or anaesthetic nurse to work with for the morning, and be on my way. This became easier as the weeks went on, and

people got to know me and recognise me, but for the first couple of weeks it was quite hard and draining.

On the plus side, the fact that I was the only externe around meant I very much had my pick of the theatre lists going around. I tried to vary the things I could see, as different surgical specialities necessitated different anaesthetic approaches and considerations. For instance, cardiothoracics enabled me to do lots of arterial and central lines, while ENT offered the opportunity to think about some really challenging patients from the perspective of airway management.

In general, the anaesthetics team were all very friendly. In France, there are anaesthetic nurse specialists (and you often cannot tell the difference between them and the doctors) who do a lot of the work in preparing, anaesthetising and intubating patients. They are a fountain of knowledge and are very keen to get you practically involved.

As part of my placement, I also did a couple of full day/long day shifts in HDU/ICU. This was mostly a way to change-up what became quite a repetitive placement on anaesthetics. However, I was pleased to find that this side of things actually welcomed French externes and thus catered much more to bed-side teaching. I was able to see many patients with signs that I have only ever before seen in textbooks, and I am grateful for the opportunity to have consolidated that learning in my mind.

*Typical Week on Placement 1 : (Based on a week in theatre)*

<b>Monday</b>	<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>Thursday</b>	<b>Friday</b>
07h30 – 13h00 : Theatre list (ENT)	07h30 – 13h00 : Theatre list (Urology)	07h30 – 13h00 : Theatre list (Cardiothoracic)	08h30 – 11h00 : HDU/ICU rounds	07h30 – 13h00 : Theatre list (Thoracic)
Home	Home	14 :00 – 17 :00 Continuation of list	11h00- 12h00 : Teaching	Home

## Reflections on Placement 2

**Good For :** Exposure to niche speciality not widely available to UK doctors or medical students, development of surgical skills, making friends

**Perhaps Not For :** Those who want something more general, those who want to focus on consultation skills

My placement on Paediatric Plastics and Maxillo-Facial Surgery at Necker was a dream. This was not originally a placement option at Descartes, but with a desire to pursue this type of surgery in future, I simply got in touch with the Chef de Service (Professeur Picard) and had the placement approved. We do not get to pursue Maxillo-Facial surgery in the UK as medical students unless we also hold or obtain a Dentistry degree, so this was a really unique and important opportunity.

The placement itself was very well run and organised. The team is relatively large, comprising around 8-10 consultants, 6-8 internes (junior doctors) and 6 externes. Every member of staff was extremely friendly and inclusive, and most of them were very young in spirit if not in age, as well ! The team spirit is quite apparent and for me this came as a huge contrast and relief to my previous placement in Anaesthetics.

The placement is organised so that every externe is paired up with an interne. This works quite well, as it means you are able to shadow and assist in numerous different areas of the speciality ; emergencies, the ward, theatre, consultations, research. Internes tend to change their responsibilities on a weekly basis, which

meant that the wide breadth of experience was matched by a fast-pace.

In addition to this pairing, the externes are given weekly teaching at least once a week (although at the start of the placement the teaching is much more frequent and full-on). The teaching covered not only plastic surgery, but also other sub-specialities in paediatric surgery such as neurosurgery, ENT, orthopaedics and general (visceral) surgery. Externes are also expected to give a presentation at least once during the duration of their placement. This is usually based on a clinical case that they have found interesting during the week they have spent on the wards or in theatre, but this is flexible.

Personally, I also took the opportunity to maximise on the fact that the department welcomes children from all over France and therefore has the great privilege of seeing some rare pathology. This makes the department very hot on their research and publication output. I made sure to complete some work on the side (in the afternoons off) to get involved in this side of things, too.

*Typical Week on Placement 2 : (Based on a week in theatre)*

<b>Monday</b>	<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>Thursday</b>	<b>Friday</b>
07h30 – 13h00 : Theatre list	07h30 – 13h00 : Theatre list	08h00 – 10h30 : Teaching	07h30 – 13h00 : Theatre list	07h30 – 11h00 : Theatre list
Home	Home	14 :00 – 17 :00 – Day-case theatre (optional)	Home Or Research	11h00 – 13h00 : Presentations and Teaching

### **Linguistic and Personal Development**

The process of getting to the placement in Europe is a long and arduous one and, even if you do revise a great deal beforehand,

there is very little that can prepare you for the speed, complexity and nuances of natural conversation in Paris. The first month was, as such, incredibly exhausting.

Yet, it is important not to let oneself become too disheartened by one's previous level of knowledge, recent OLS score or by the brain burnout that everyone experiences following medical finals – you will surprise yourself.

I feel my level of confidence, fluidity of language and knowledge of colloquial vocabulary has improved immeasurably simply by living and working here. Although I can still struggle to communicate verbally myself, I generally follow all conversations easily and can contribute in an appropriate and accurate manner. This applies both in the hospital setting and outside in Paris life 'à la quotidienne'.

It can be handy to download a bilingual dictionary app to your mobile, for those moments where you're searching aimlessly for a particular word, yet in general the Parisians appreciate any attempts to speak French and are generally encouraging. In fact, they are usually extremely impressed (and rather shocked) that a British person can speak any French at all.

Personally, I would not recommend following any online language learning – vocabulary, grammar or otherwise – alongside working on your placement. Being immersed in French on a daily basis is sufficient. While immensely tiring for the brain, it is also important not make mastery of the language the entirety of your focus while

abroad. The placement is also about learning medicine, learning skills for foundation training, gauging whether or not this, or that, speciality could suit you. Most of all, it is about rewarding yourself for surviving medical school and its endless examinations and hardships – so enjoying some sort of ‘time off’ is key.

If you’re still keen to learn more, nevertheless, there are always plenty of ways to absorb the language passively ; shows at the theatre and cinema (with cheap student tickets that can be purchased last minute), as well as conversation evenings organised by the university. Should you have Netflix, your account will automatically start showing you the availability of French programmes and films, too.

On a personal level, I believe the experience of living in Paris for four months has been an important and enjoyable one. It has challenged my timidity by forcing me to start conversations, assert myself and make myself known in the hospital, and this has shown me how adaptable I can be to fitting in with any medical team. It has enabled me to reflect on the similarities that doctors share across nationalities and healthcare systems, as well as on some very important differences.

Most strikingly of all, I have enjoyed the importance given in France to safeguarding coffee and lunch time for doctors. It is a sacred time that is meant for recuperation and socialising, virtually no matter the business of the day. It is a time spent as a team, but also as friends.

Similarly, doctors *a/ways* have an office ; somewhere to rest with a bed for on-calls. Staffrooms are also aplenty in the hospitals here. These things communicate a sense of appreciation for healthcare staff, as well as show an understanding of the realities of the vocation. That is, sometimes a bit of a break is very much necessary ! These things remain despite the French health system suffering at levels that are on par with those of the UK. While I am not sure how I will be able to carry this forward to working in the UK, I will keep in mind the need to force myself, and colleagues, to take a break.

As regards what I have grown to appreciate about the UK, I have to say that I have seen a definite difference in time and effort spent with patients in the UK. Although communication skills may seem to us students as a mantra used by the university, after seeing how often patients in France feel confused or dissatisfied with their consultations has really made me rethink the value of good communication. In particular, doctors in the UK spend time explaining procedures, explaining reasons for examinations, reasons for their questions or actions towards patients. Here in France, it seems as though patients expect their doctors to dictate the nature and evolution of the consultation.

There is perhaps some strength to be highlighted in both examples. Here in France, this sense of 'doctor knows best' is still quite powerful and perhaps commands a certain level of respect from patients that is oftentimes lost or not apparent in the UK. On the other hand, empowering patients to be able to communicate their views and worries, as well as to educate them to better take

charge of managing their condition, is something I strongly believe in.

The other striking difference is that here in France medical students sit an exam that essentially determines their speciality (and where they will practice), straight out of medical school. This has some advantages, provided you are allocated the speciality you like. It means you get to specialise quickly, train up to consultant level and gain a wide exposure to training very early on. This is particularly good if you want to do surgery – and are craving getting into theatre.

The other side of the coin is, however, that a huge decision is based on a few hours on one day – an exam – that removes a lot of the element of choice from your hands. This understandably creates a lot of anxiety amongst students, and can create a very competitive and highly-strung atmosphere. Indeed, I very much had the sense here that students were not very close to one another, in general terms, but rather remained acquaintances for the majority of their medical school careers.

### **General Advice and Top Tips**

Seeing as the placement is an elective period, it is really important to take some time to enjoy being in a new place and exploring all it has to offer. The following tips will help you to make the most of your time and hopefully will save you a headache:

- **In France, they love paperwork !**

Bring numerous copies of your passport, birth certificate, EHIC card, travel insurance, as well as numerous new passport photos. You may also wish to get documents translated if you are going to apply for financial aid for housing (CAF). Be prepared to spend a lot of time filling in paperwork, correcting yourself, and waiting for paperwork processing.

- **Accessing prescribed/non-prescribed medicines is a bit different in France**

If you take any prescribed medications in the UK, make sure you get a copy of your prescription that is legible and signed by hand by your GP. For most common medications, having the physical prescription to hand will mean you can simply walk into any pharmacy in Paris and buy your prescription there and then (no need to see a French GP first.) This is likely to cost more than the flat-fee for prescriptions in the UK. Most other medications or toiletries can also be bought at French pharmacies, but at a premium as compared to the UK. If you don't want to fork out the cash, stock up on extra toothpaste and shampoo with you !

- **University accomodation**

Be prepared to potentially not have any WiFi for the first week if you're moving into university accommodation. They can be very slow at setting things up for you. Some accomodation buildings are also very old and a little delapidated, so it is important not to have high hopes of a chic Parisian apartment. However, some do come with free

access to good sports facilities and they are generally quite cheap to live in.

- **Strikes, Siestas, Sundays and bank holidays**

Although this is starting to change a little, most shops, including supermarkets, tend to close between 12h00 and 16h00 (approximately) during the week, on Sundays and on bank holidays. This also applies to most offices (including those in the hospital) and to many tourist attractions, restaurants and cafes.

Strikes of some description are bound to happen during your time in Paris. During my time, we had transport strikes for the national railway (SNCF) and airline (AirFrance) on two days a week for a few months. There were also student strikes going on constantly. This can be a real spanner in the works if you are planning on being a tourist or inviting family/friends to visit you – so make sure you keep in the loop about these sorts of things well in advance.

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