

European Studies French



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### 1. Background

#### a) Studying medicine with European Studies (ES)

I was aware that Manchester offered the opportunity to study a language alongside the medical studies before I applied for Universities way back when in college but this didn't have any influence over my choice (or lack thereof – I received the one offer). However, having come through the process and having profited from the additional opportunities that ES provided, I can now see that it was a brilliant option to have. Not least as I have found a very good friend through e-tandem, along with meeting his community in Paris and having contacts there whenever I return.

#### b) Personal reflection on French throughout medical school

Learning French granted me the opportunity to speak with older family members in Mauritius who spoke Creole but no English. It worked perfectly for initial motivation but eventually the wider benefits of learning a new language became apparent. Along with aspirations to work abroad in the future for organisations such as MSF (Médecins sans Frontières), the drive to continue with the extra work that ES provided was ever present. Without these drives, it would have been difficult to continue with French studies due to the time and mental energy that it took up. During phase 1, this wasn't such a difficult commitment but when it became evening classes after a day of placement already in phase 2 I found a clear desired end-goal necessary for continuing. Most of you reading will already understand this and will probably have clear motivations as you start final year.

#### c) Why Lausanne

Having done my 3<sup>rd</sup> year PEP in Paris, I wanted to see a different country with a different healthcare system. Similarly, I had never been to Switzerland and enjoyed the idea of living somewhere new with plenty to explore. Additionally, 3 students from Lausanne joined us in 4<sup>th</sup> year for their Erasmus year and did a very good job of promoting their city – both with pictures of the lake and mountains and also with their genuine and friendly personalities.

#### d) Pre-departure feelings

It was difficult to really get excited for coming away, partly as it was so soon after finals and they held most of my attention for such a long time. However, I remember thinking I was definitely not prepared for going to a different country and doing placements in French for 4 months. I don't think there's much you can do to avoid this feeling! However, I was comforted with the experience that I'd had in Paris for my PEP – it was hard, tiring and often embarrassing but it was doable and so worth it. Especially when considering the progress you can make linguistically, along with how much you learn about other healthcare systems and our own. After finals, I was keen to see my friends and to catch up with everyone in Manchester after a long revision period and 5 or 6 years of studying together. However, there was little time to do so and this was quite disappointing. 4 months goes quickly when you're busy and there will still be a couple of months of easily seeing people before everyone disperses for Foundation jobs so it's not the end of the world.

## 2. Medicine

#### a) System

Unlike the UK, all healthcare services are provided by private companies with no free state-provided services. Healthcare insurance in Switzerland is compulsory and graded. There is basic health insurance that companies are required to provide, regardless of a person's age or medical status, and without making a profit. This theoretically avoids double standards in care. This insurance will then cover a patient's treatment and hospitalisation up to a point. Contributions are then expected of patients in various ways with limits set in place for maximum spending. This system promotes competitive prices between companies and across different areas of Switzerland and also gives much more autonomy to the population, who are effectively encouraged to consider their own health and how much they expect to be using healthcare services. It isn't a *bad* system. However, being brought up in the UK with the NHS, it's difficult to see different standards of care delivered to patients depending on their expendable income. This may be as simple as waiting less time or always being seen by a professor for those with the most expensive insurance plans.

#### b) Approach to staff

For those of you who have done placements in France, I place Switzerland somewhere in between the UK and France in terms of their general medical approach. It is very traditional with a clear set hierarchy amongst the doctors (médecins assistants, chefs de cliniques, médecins cadres et puis chefs de services). Although this is comparable to graded posts in the UK, there is little interaction between the groups, discouraging an open team atmosphere. Students have to be proactive as in the UK. However, teaching is very theoretical here and very rarely (if ever) would you have bedside teaching with a consultant-equivalent. For these reasons, I am glad to have studied at Manchester with a heavy focus on clinical teaching, communication skills and teamwork.

When addressing staff, I have been mocked slightly for using *vous* with médecin assistants even the first time I've spoken with them. However, médecins cadres and above would normally expect you to *vouvoier* them. Otherwise, I've used *vous* for addressing nurses or allied health professionals if I don't know them and especially if I'm requesting something. If this is inappropriate, the worst they'll do is take the mick a bit or realise you're British and overly polite.

#### c) Approach to patients

Again, patient approach falls somewhere between the UK and France. Patients are treated with an adequate level of respect but are often ignored if what they're saying isn't deemed appropriate. After all, they are there to follow what the medical staff say in order to get better, not to have a chat and go around the houses. I understand this approach and it works well here and in France. However, I'm uncomfortable with it for a couple of reasons. First of all, the patient doesn't always know what's relevant or not and secondly, psychological stress of being a patient and being in hospital can be offset by clear explanations and a friendly approach. This obviously varies from person to person and cannot truly be generalised for entire countries.

#### d) Approach to food and breaks

We have a lot to learn from other Europeans about our approach to food! Staff were often horrified to hear that people eat their home-brought sandwiches at their desks, work through lunch without eating or grab a subway or similar fast food from within the hospital grounds. Here, there is fresh

bread with spreads and fruit on the wards for snacks. Water dispensers are found everywhere with cold, normal or fizzy water. The cafeteria is huge and the food provided is delicious and nutritious. For CHF8.30 you can get a warm meal, soup and bread and the meals vary every day. Lunch time is the time for small talk with the team you've worked with and represents a decent break during the day.

#### e) Placements

So understandably, Swiss final year students get the first pick of what placements they want to have. As such, I received none of the placements that I applied for. Instead, I got a mix of quite unusual placements that provided very interesting experiences but didn't provide the usual benefits of placements I'd done in the UK (eg. improving clinical skills, taking many histories, thinking on differentials and management plans etc).

#### *La médecine légale*

This was a fascinating experience at a world-famous centre for legal medicine. I was with another student from Zurich and together, we saw a dozen autopsies, had tours around the toxicology and genetics labs and attended a *l'évee du corps* (site of scene where body was found with police). I also attended prison with the medicine of violence doctor where I saw the only live patient during the month. During the placement, more was expected of us in terms of taking pictures during examinations, scribing the notes during autopsies and eventually cutting organs for gross pathology. When there were no bodies however there was very little to do. We had a presentation to prepare and there was the opportunity to read around subjects not covered at Manchester such as determining the hour of death but there was a lot of waiting around and there was very little in the way of teaching. The cases we saw were very interesting though definitely not for the faint-hearted, particularly with putrefied bodies. I'm far from faint-hearted but actually, it was more distressing in hindsight when considering people the same age who'd had an accident and died or suicides with very violent methods. Personally the main problem was the feeling that we were reading the second half of a story without any hope of changing the outcome or knowing what was going on in their lives beforehand. Of course, it's important to get answers. However, this placement felt much more law-based than medicine based. Because of this, it was the start of my feelings of becoming deskilled in terms of taking histories and examining patients. The days were from 08:00 until around 16:00 but the days were rarely busy all day. Also, it was a metro and bus ride away from the accommodation near the hospital (CHUV) which only took around half an hour.

#### *La section d'addictologie*

Again, a very different placement from those I'd done in the UK. Here, I was at a voluntary centre in the grounds of the psychiatric hospital for those trying to overcome their addiction to various drugs (mainly heroin, cocaine and benzodiazepines). They stayed in the centre for 3 weeks on average and had access to nurses 24/7 and doctors during the day. The team I was with was great and I had my own desk and computer. With plenty of spare time, this made foundation job applications and keeping up to date with portfolio quite easy. It was mainly observation work during interviews and attendance at meetings with various teams. However, there were very interesting cases and it was easy to speak to the patients as they were all relatively well (though difficult to speak to them about medicine as you don't want to talk about heroin too much with someone trying not to think about

heroin). The complexity of language cues in psychiatry and difficulties with French made this quite a difficult placement to be involved. There was a lot of teaching for the médecin assistant whom I was shadowing which was useful for me too. The days properly started at 10am and the afternoons were often very quiet if there was no teaching which made it quite a laid-back placement as you can imagine.

### *Les soins intensifs*

I really didn't enjoy this placement. It wasn't very well suited for students for several reasons. The cases were very complex and there was very little opportunity to do anything other than observing. The days started at 07:15 with a meeting every day and as a student you were expected to be there until 17-18:00 (although I admittedly rarely was as it didn't feel very useful to stay so long) and as you can imagine was very tiring. There were many interesting procedures to watch and it was useful following patients through the stay. I also think I could have probably been more proactive in getting ABGs or arterial lines done but I did use an ultrasound a couple of times. The doctors also didn't really know what was expected of a student.

### *L'ORL*

This was the best placement that I did as I was finally in hospital able to clerk patients, examine them and think on differential diagnoses and management plans. This is what I was hoping to do for 4 months to improve my French and so as not to lose what I'd learnt during my student assistantship and finals revision. Unfortunately, it was the shorter of the placements at 3 weeks. It was also very difficult sometimes to get experience as the team was so big and not that concerned with where you are as an erasmus student. There were also different groups of 4th year students from Lausanne every week. It was surprising how much we could help them with clinical skills such as otoscopy. This was also great for general interactions with other students who were very used to having Erasmus students with them. Other available opportunities were much broader than for the other placements – surgery lists, on-call, procedural endoscopies etc.

## 3. Accommodation

There are several options for accommodation including a house share, rent flats and university accommodation. The latter is much cheaper and probably easier to arrange too. Honestly, I don't remember applying for accommodation but I received an email saying 'further to your application' and was placed in Falaises FMEL (fondation maisons des étudiants). This suggests that it was straight forward and was probably in amongst the various forms that we completed and submitted during the general application process with the MyPlacement portal. The rent is very reasonable at CHF530 per month.

The staff are friendly but send lots of emails and several times I was messaged saying I hadn't taken the recycling out. This was all but once in error as I was on top of my weeks for taking the rubbish out - however, it didn't stop me being named and shamed in a group email to the floor and I never received an apology! They also said nothing could be left out in the kitchen, even if it was washed up pots, and that the cleaners would remove them. Similarly the working hours for seeing an attendant

at the accommodation were very inconvenient, especially when travelling to placements early. For example, if you want to use a vacuum cleaner, you have to go between 7:30-8:00 to request this.

Altogether, these things didn't bother me too much but the strictness of the rules, although in line with the strictness of the rules in Switzerland in general, did get a bit much.

The lay-out of the accommodation didn't encourage much mixing and there were still people I'd not met after 4 months of sharing the same kitchen. I found that many people stayed in their rooms and although there were rooms for parties or for preparing to go out, I never actually saw anyone use these.

I don't think this would have been ideal for first year students (especially compared to the social life provided from Whitworth halls in Manchester first year) but actually, it worked great as a final year and I was content living there - mainly for the following reasons.

The students I did meet were a real mix of mainly Europeans. They mainly spoke French although there were a few who only spoke English as their second language. As it is so close to the hospital there were also many medical students who were interesting to speak with. Having your own fridge/freezer in your room was convenient although it was odd not having one in the kitchen. As for bathrooms, they had decent facilities and I shared with only one other (between 3 was the maximum).

I was pleasantly surprised to find that there was a piano available in one of the basements. Although I was only granted access to this room between 18:00-20:00, it was enough to keep my fingers from itching too much.

Rent needs to be paid before the 5th of each month and is done via the post. This is very straightforward and there is a 'la poste' by the main entrance to CHUV just across the road.

It's also important to remember that you need to inform them at least one month before you are leaving so that you can arrange the meeting for checking the state of the room. I requested a cleaning kit and it took me a whole day to clean my respective areas but they weren't as strict about fines as I was expecting.

Finally, I was definitely very lucky with my randomly assigned room. I was on the top floor facing south towards the lake. As you can see from the picture - taken from my own balcony - this provided a spectacular view of Lausanne, the lake, French mountains and also snow, storms and sunshine. I'm sure having this room made a massive difference to my experience there in general.



#### 4. La ville

##### a) Transport

Lausanne is a relatively same city and it is very easy to get around with public transport. There are 2 metros, the older M1 going East-West and the newer M2 going from the port in the South further North. Buses are frequent and easy to figure out and the train system is well-organised and clean (though slightly mor expensive than neighbouring countries). As I was commuting and getting buses and the LEB (kind of tram) for my first two placements, I got a monthly pass from a travel shop for CHF52. This includes all buses and metros within a large area. There is also the demi-tarif that gives you half price on trains and other transport and is probably well worth the money if you're planning on travelling around Switzerland at the weekends. Otherwise, it is also very easy to walk around Lausanne which provides both the benefits of seeing the city and the odd mountains peaking from behind traditional buildings, along with the benefit of getting your heart rate going on some rather steep roads.

##### b) Shopping

Rather frustratingly and in stark comparison to Manchester, most of the supermarkets and shops close by 7pm during the week, 6pm on Saturdays and aren't open at all on Sundays. This can be quite tricky with lo working hours but I soon got used to it. I didn't dare do any shopping other than groceries and although my average shop was quite expensive, you begin to find the products that are reasonably priced. I don't like being stingy or spending so much time thing about expenses but actually, it's probably a good life lesson before starting work.

There are often markets in the main squares and the closer it got to summer, the more food festivals and street stalls opened up. Of course, the food is always delicious.



## 5. Administration

The administration drove me crazy in Switzerland. It felt like I was forever filling out forms, getting letters about other forms and being threatened with fines for not filling out forms I thought I'd already filled out. I probably have a low tolerance for this type of life admin but hopefully the paragraph lay-out below will make things more clear for you.

### a) Bureau des Etrangers

You are expected to present yourself to the bureau des étrangers (foreign office) upon your arrival. There's a form to fill out if you're staying for more than 3 months, another for a work permit and another to fill out on leaving the country. The first will cost CHF30 but you shouldn't have to pay any more fees (they may say that you do, stick to your guns!)

### b) L'école de médecine and Les Ressources Humaines

Across the road from CHUV in the same building as la musée de la main (well sign-posted) is the medical school on 5th floor and human resources on 3rd floor. You will become well acquainted with these two places for handing in end of placement forms and your salary forms, respectively. Initially, it's important to go here to collect your CHUV badge and your form for collecting your white coat.

### c) Assurance

Although you will already be covered for medical insurance from the medical school, you need to provide evidence for this. I got this from the European Studies coordinators and wasn't too difficult. Then there's insurance for your property - it cost me CHF10 after having sent 3 letters in response.

### d) Taxes de séjour

Twice I had to prove that I was exempt from taxes as I was a student in receipt of a bursary but it wasn't too much hassle.

### e) UNIL (L'université de Lausanne)

Although I went to the university to pick up my student card, I had forgotten to fill out the necessary form for it (there was always going to be one). As such, I was asked to return to get my card. However, I had no use for the card and didn't fancy using one of my days off to return. This wasn't a problem.

There's nothing difficult about this admin work and I'm sure I made a bigger deal out of it than necessary. However, just be prepared for a barrage of forms

## 7) General advice

- arrive early so that you can sort everything above out with ease
- sort out old phone or if with 02 remember to unblock your phone before going out
- think about being proactive to avoid becoming clinically deskilled

-be prepared for eating with staff very often

-pack a variety of clothes, it was way hotter than I was expecting: I wore my thick socks once (despite having 4 pairs), didn't have any proper shorts etc

-inform bank that you're travelling

#### 8) General positives and negatives

So I'll throw the negative aspects of my experience out so that I can finish on a high – it was overwhelmingly positive after all. The administration and bureaucracy is heavy and constant. Together with rules and regulations, the Swiss system often felt very rigid. I became much more deskilled, having relatively poor experience compared to pre-finals placements. Then there's the fact that it's so very expensive.

However, we get paid, and it's not a bad salary at CHF920 per month. As I was unaware about this and remained in a 'stingy mind-set', I have enough money left over to get me out of my overdraft and maybe jet-set again this summer. The people themselves are very friendly and every Swiss national I knew had been well brought up. There's a similar feel to Manchester in that there is a wide range of international students and they're used to people coming from all over the world. The country is clearly very rich and it provided a brilliant opportunity to compare to travels in block 1 to Uganda and Rwanda to see what it's like on the other side. Finally, the scenery and countryside is gorgeous. I was astonished by the vastness and beauty of the mountains and lake, and this awe didn't fade after 4 months.

I recommend Lausanne; it's a beautiful place, great for learning French and travelling and also provided me with some summer spending money.