

# European Studies Lausanne, Switzerland 2017



## **Why I chose European Studies**

I have always enjoyed learning languages. When I found out about the European Studies option during my first year, I decided that it would be a good way to keep up with the French I learnt during A-levels. I enjoyed the evening French classes and found them to be a nice change from studying Medicine. I am also considering working abroad, so for me this was a great opportunity to experience living and working in another country for 4 months. I chose to go to Switzerland as I love hiking and being outdoors. I also thought it would be interesting to live in a francophone city and compare Swiss French with French.

## **Centre Hospitalier Universitaire Vaudois (CHUV):**

I am keen on trying new things so I decided to choose placements that I would not normally have the opportunity to do in Manchester. I decided on two months of Clinical Pharmacology and two months of Public Health. There is the option of only doing one month placements but I thought that 4 weeks would not be enough to really integrate within a team and to participate in research activities.

The CHUV is one of five university hospitals in Switzerland and provides acute and specialist care for the whole Canton of Vaud and other areas in Suisse Romande. The hospital has staff from a variety of different nationalities and so a lot of people speak French as their second or third language. The hospital is very close to the city centre and is just opposite the university Falaises accommodation.

## **Clinical pharmacology**

The clinical pharmacology department is based in the CHUV and deals with both internal and external consultations from doctors. The unit offers 4 main services: 1) Therapeutic drug monitoring for both inpatient and outpatients which is mainly done by the pharmacists 2) STIS (Swiss Teratogen Information Service) which deals with questions about the risk of teratogenicity associated with drug/chemical exposure during pregnancy 3) Pharmacovigilance reporting 4) General internal and external consultations. How the service works is as follows: If a doctor has a query they would either bleep, phone or email the department. The on-call doctor for that service would then research the topic and write a report which would be sent to the GP or uploaded onto the medical system if it was an inpatient.

The working hours were quite flexible and depended on the workload. I would usually start at 8:30 and finish at 17:30 but I would have to stay later if I was still working on a consultation. On Monday morning we would have a quick department meeting (colloque) and each doctor and pharmacist would be delegated a role. In total there were 4 médecins assistants and 5 chefs de clinique as well as several pharmacists working in the unit.

The consultations were very interesting. I would mainly work on STIS consultations and the internal consultations. At first I would research the topic by searching in PubMed for case reports, looking at Swissmedic info (the Swiss version of the BNF) and paper resources. I would then discuss the case with the médecin assistant who would write up our findings. We would then go together to discuss the case with the chef de clinique before uploading the report onto the system. At first, I had no idea what I was doing as we do not have this service in the UK but I quickly learnt how to tackle the questions. What helped was that we often had similar questions (e.g. how to adjust drug doses if rifampicin is given) and so I learnt how to recycle previous consultations! After the first two weeks, I became more confident and began writing up my own consultation reports (usually 2-3 pages long) and discussing them directly with the chef de clinique. I enjoyed being able to work independently

and signing my own consultation letters! There was also a Phase II trial going on at the time so I had the chance to help out by examining patients and recording observations.

Example consultations:

- Patient has just found out that she is pregnant and has been taking warfarin
- Patient is pregnant and has accidentally swallowed her fluconazole vaginal tablets
- Pregnant patient needs malaria chemoprophylaxis
- Drug interactions
- Errors in drug dosing or administration (e.g. vincristine administered SC instead of IV)
- Management of metformin-induced metabolic acidosis

Every Thursday at 13:30 there would be a colloque which would last an hour and the doctors would ask for advice or present interesting cases. I was expected to present a case each week. At first I was a bit nervous but I grew more confident over time and I would tend to practise presenting the case with one of the *médecins assistants* beforehand. There were also several optional lectures that you could attend.

I found that this placement was really beneficial as before I started I was not very confident with prescribing. There are so many things that I learnt that I think will be useful once I start prescribing in FY1. I even decided to come back early and sit my PSA exam in March. The environment was very friendly and everyone was so supportive. The team was also very sociable and everyone would go for lunch together in the canteen which was nice and we also organised a few evenings out together. There are not a lot of students who choose this placement so everyone was happy to have a *stagiaire* around and made me feel included.

### **Public Health, Institut universitaire de médecine sociale et préventive**

I am interested in Public Health so I thought this placement would be a good opportunity to participate in research projects. I didn't have a particular subject that I was interested in so I chose to take part in two projects that were going on. The main project involved analysing population trends in obesity and thinness in children of the Seychelles. The second project involved identifying risk factors for haemorrhagic and thrombotic events in elderly patients on anticoagulant therapy.

This placement was completely different to the other placement. It reminded me of my Year 4 PEP as the working hours were flexible but the total workload was always the same. I usually came in at 9:00 and left at 17:00, but stayed longer if I still had work to do. The IUMSP is in Vennes (3 metro stops from CHUV) so for lunch I would usually stay in the department. Everyone there spoke English and there were a lot of English, Americans and Australians working there. When I first started, everyone would speak to me in English and I would reply in French! You have to really make an effort to speak French otherwise the Swiss will take the opportunity to practice their already-perfect English.

This placement was really useful as I learnt how to perform statistical analyses and use the Stata program – something that I did not need to learn for my Year 4 PEP. I would recommend this placement if you are interested in research as you have the opportunity to make useful contacts and there's the possibility of getting your work published or presented.



## ACCOMMODATION

Housing is expensive in Lausanne so the only two options for students are either university or hospital accommodation. Accommodation is high in demand so make sure you register online early. I applied for both and the university FMEL accommodation were the first to reply. It costs 530CHF per month for a room with a bathroom shared with one or two other students. You have to pay a refundable deposit of 1200CHF. There are also studios and rooms with private en suite but you are less likely to be offered them due to the high demand. I stayed at Falaises (*une falaise*=cliff) which is just on the other side of the road from the hospital. There are several other FMEL buildings and I wouldn't worry if you get placed somewhere else as the metro system is great in Lausanne and it never takes too long to get to the hospital. In Falaises, there were a lot of medical students and international students. Each floor has a kitchen which is shared with 8-10 other students. You have your own locked cupboard in the kitchen and a fridge in your room. The kitchen is well-equipped with an oven, stove and microwave. Recycling is taken very seriously here in Switzerland so there was a rota to take out the different recycling bin. You also have to pay 2CHF a month to pay for the taxed bin bags.

The rooms are a decent size and most have a balcony. When I was there, I used the Ethernet cable for internet but they were installing Wi-Fi in the building when I left. The atmosphere is nice at Falaises. Two of the Manchester students were also staying there so we would meet up for dinner and there are always people to socialise with in the kitchen so you never feel lonely. You are also allowed to have people staying over you as long as you email the Intendant 7 days in advance so I invited a few friends over.

## TRANSPORT

I travelled to Lausanne by plane as there are cheap direct flights to Geneva. At the airport, there is a free travel ticket which you can get from a machine in the baggage hall which gives you free travel in the Geneva area for 90 minutes. If you want to visit Geneva before heading to Lausanne you can leave your luggage in the lockers at Geneva Cornavin station. I would recommend buying your Geneva-Lausanne ticket in advance as trains in Switzerland are expensive. Some students bought the demi tariff card which gives you 50% off all tickets which may be useful if you plan on travelling very often. I decided to buy *billets dégriffés* in advance from the SBB website which can be up to 50% cheaper than tickets bought on the day.

Once I got to Lausanne, I bought a Mobilis travel card for 52CHF per month for zones 11 and 12 which covers the greater Lausanne area. The transport network in Lausanne is excellent and tickets are valid on bus, train, tram and metro. Lausanne is very hilly so it is difficult to cycle so I wouldn't recommend bringing your bike unless it is electric! With your university card you can use a Publibike (similar to Boris bikes in London) for 90 minutes for free. The bike stations are mainly found in the campus area, Ouchy and Renens train station. You can also rent a Publibike for 1 day for 10CHF which can be nice if you want to cycle along the lake towards Morges or Montreux. There is also a reCYCLO bike shop where you can rent a bike from 70CHF for 3 months. Swiss people seem to be generally very active and a lot of people in Lausanne get around using scooters (*une trottinette*) or roller blades (*les rollers*).





## FOOD & SHOPPING

At first I was surprised by how much I had to spend on food! The cheapest supermarket is Aldi (near Bessières metro stop) but it is still much more expensive than Aldi in the UK. I think the best thing is to buy your groceries from different places and that way you can compare prices. Other supermarkets include Denner and Migros. I went back home twice during my stay and brought back a lot of food! During the week, supermarkets close at 7pm and on Saturday they close at 6pm. Everything is closed on Sunday except the Co-op at the train station and Migros near Ouchy. There is also a large market in Place de la Riponne on Saturday mornings where you can buy fresh food.

I also discovered an *Armée du Salut* charity shop near the Riponne metro station which sells a lot of household items at reasonable prices. There, I bought all my kitchen things and blankets and some roller skates for 9CHF! You can then donate everything back to them once you leave if you don't have much baggage allowance.

## TRAVEL

Because I was working full time during the week, this really motivated me to make the most of my weekends. We were allowed to take two days off per month and we had the two Easter bank holidays which gave me enough time to travel and visit nearby cities. I bought all my train tickets in advance so it wasn't too expensive.

### *Places to visit in Lausanne:*

- Port d'Ouchy
- It's nice to walk or skate along lac Léman. My favourite areas were Maladière and Vidy
- The Unil Campus is very beautiful and is next to the lake
- Tour de Sauvabelin is a wooden tower built in the Sauvabelin forest which has an amazing panoramic view of the lake, mountains and surrounding countryside. You can get there by taking the number 16 bus or walking from the hospital and it is free to enter.
- Palais de Rumine in Place de Riponne has 5 museums which are free to enter. There are several other museums which are free to enter on the first Saturday of each month.

### *Canton de Vaud:*

- St Suplice: This is a cute little village which is 2.5 km away from the Unil campus. It's nice to cycle there and to picnic by the lake
- Morges: This is next biggest city to the West of Lausanne and takes around 30 minutes to cycle there (8 km). My favourite thing to do was visit the beach as it is nice and quiet as not a lot of tourists go there. As you walk along the lake the promenade is replaced by *le sentier de la truite* which is a natural path through the forest
- Vevey: 19 km from Lausanne, mainly flat so I would often cycle here and spend the day by the lake. You can also take the funicular train up to *Mont Pelerin* and enjoy an amazing view of the Alps and Lac Léman
- Montreux: This city is 7km from Vevey, and I would say is the most beautiful area in Canton de Vaud and is an amazing place to go hiking. The most popular hiking trail is up *Les Rochers de Naye*, however it's best to wait until May before hiking there as it can be dangerous because of the snow



#### *Canton du Valais:*

- Martigny: 45 minutes by train. Beautiful Alpine village famous for its Mont Blanc train.
- Sion: 15 minutes by train from Martigny. Places to see include *Domaine des Iles* and *Chateau de Tourbillon*
- Sierre: 10 minutes by train from Sion. This was my favourite city in the Alpine region. Things to do include hiking in the Finges Nature Park and swimming in Lac Géronde

#### *Canton de Neuchâtel:*

- Neuchâtel: Known for its castle and Lac de Neuchâtel
- La Chaux-de-Fonds: Swiss watch-making capital
- Les Brenets: 10 minutes by train from Le Locle will take you to this small village which lies on the River Doubs which forms the French-Swiss border. Nice to walk along the river when the weather is nice and visit the *Saut du Doubs* waterfall.

#### *Canton de Fribourg:*

- Fribourg: Old city which forms the cultural border between Suisse romande and Suisse alémanique. Interesting bilingual city where one side of the river speak French and the other side German.

#### *Canton de Berne:*

- Berne: This is the capital city of Switzerland and is located in Suisse alémanique. Things to see include the Old Town, the Bears of Berne and the fast-flowing river Aar (although I would not advice swimming in the river as the locals do!)

### **Linguistic development and Inter-cultural understanding**

My French speaking has improved a lot. At the beginning, I would hardly speak and would have to formulate phrases in my head before talking. As time went on, I became much more confident and it was much easier to speak fluently (and forget about the mistakes you are making). There are four official languages of Switzerland: German, French, Italian and Romansh. I felt that this made the Swiss very multicultural and they would often assume that you must speak another Swiss language if your French is not perfect. At work, they would often encourage me to speak and not correct my mistakes too often. I found Swiss French easier than French as they tend to simplify things such as using septante/huitante/nonante for numbers 70, 80 and 90. The Swiss accent is also more musical than French, they tend to speak slower and they use a lot of *anglicismes* which makes life easy when you cannot remember a word in French. I also picked up several Swiss expressions such as *santé!* (when someone sneezes), *Tout de bon* (Bonne continuation), *Je me réjouis de* (J'ai hate de) and my all-time favourite *Ça joue?* (Ça marche?) which can be conjugated into past, future and conditional tenses!

I found the Swiss to be very friendly and it was normal to say bonjour to everyone you see when walking down the street. In hospital, I felt that there was no strict hierarchy and it was normal for me to eat lunch with my consultant whereas I don't think I would do that in the UK. With other students and médecins assistants we addressed each other as "tu". In both of my placements, my consultants addressed me as "tu" as well but it's best to address them as "vous" until they themselves ask "on peut se tutoyer?" or "on se tutoie?". I also found that the Swiss are more direct and straight to the point which surprised me at first. Another difference is that medical education in UK focusses more on communication skills whereas medical students in Switzerland tend to be more knowledgeable. The working day is longer than the UK and it was normal for doctors to work longer than their paid hours. However, the workload is lighter than in the UK and doctors seemed to have fewer patients and appeared to be more relaxed.

## Practical issues

The Swiss love their paperwork so my advice is to stay on top of it and to regularly check your emails. I arrived in Lausanne one week before my placement began in order to sort things out and to settle in. Before you go, make sure you organise your accommodation. FMEL accommodation begins on the 1st or the 16th of each month. I decided to start my contract on the 16th of January as it was cheaper than staying in a hostel/hotel for one week.

Things to bring with you include:

- EHC card
- Copy of university health insurance contract
- B2 and C1 certificates
- Several passport photos with you as nearly everyone will ask for one
- Attestation which Unil will send you by post which confirms that you are a student
- Copy of the Unil bursary form to prove to the bureau des étrangers that you have sufficient funds

Things to do when you arrive:

- Announce your arrival which costs 30CHF
- Go to the Unil campus to collect your student card and to hand in the bursary form
- Go to the Medical School (Rue du Bugnon 21) to let them know you have arrived and then go to HR on the ground floor to sign your contract and get your hospital card and white coat. They will ask you how you want to be paid (900CHF per month). I found that being in paid in cash was better as I did not have to change money and I could pay my rent at the post office using the pay-in slips.
- If HR mentions a work permit you can tell them that you do not need it as Unil will arrange your permis de séjour.
- If you are staying in FMEL you will get a letter about home insurance; this is optional and you can return the form stating that you do not need to insure your belongings
- You will also receive a letter about taxe de séjour: you are exempt and you need to email them a copy of the bursary letter which indicates that you are a student

Things to do before leaving:

- Email the FMEL accommodation officer 2 months in advance to inform them that you are leaving and to arrange a time for the inspection of the room on the last day
- Fill in the announce of departure form in the bureau des étrangers at least 8 days before leaving
- Email HR to arrange collecting your last salary early
- Complete your placement validation forms (both Swiss and Manchester eforms)



## Conclusion

I am happy that I chose Lausanne. Although the placements can be more intense than those in France as we are expected to work fulltime, I felt that this allowed me to truly experience working in a different country. It also forced me to make the most of every free minute that I had to meet new people and discover new places in Switzerland. Despite everything being very expensive in Switzerland, the university Erasmus bursary and the monthly salary made things a lot easier. My French has improved a lot and I am now considering working in a francophone country or in an international organisation such as the WHO in the future.

## Useful websites:

Rent a bike: <http://www.recyclo.bike/locations/>

Supersaver train tickets: <https://www.sbb.ch/en/travelcards-and-tickets/tickets-for-switzerland/supersaver-tickets.html>

Registration for Publibike: <https://www.unil.ch/mobilite/fr/home/menuinst/mobilite-douce/publibike.html>

Charity shop: <https://www.brocki.ch/fr/filiales/lausanne/>

Hiking trails: <http://www.myswitzerland.com/en-gb/home.html>

