



## **Why I chose to the European Studies Programme**

Unlike some of my fellow EO students I only joined the programme in third year from St. Andrews. I had already taken an interest in the European study programme at Manchester whilst in Scotland. Most of my extended family live in Germany, and whilst already speaking some German, wanted to improve on this and gain a better insight into German culture. Moreover, the placement in fifth year seemed a good opportunity to decide whether I might like to return to my roots and do some training here in the future! The ability to do medical German classes (which in hindsight were a nice break from medicine on the wards) and to undertake a 16 week placement abroad is unparalleled by any other UK university. I was therefore very pleased to be accepted on the programme and to find out that I would be going to my first choice of city - Berlin.

## **Overview of living and working in Berlin**

I loved living in Berlin- it is an international tolerant city and well connected with public transport. In addition, I was constantly astounded by the food/events/nightlife on offer. The pace of life in some districts seems to be somewhat slower than in Manchester. I found myself adapting to this rather well!

In this part of the report I will talk about practical issues I wish I had known about before I got here.

### **1. Accommodation**

In terms of housing, this is very much left to you. You either have the choice to either privately rent or look into student halls (bear in mind that the waiting lists for student halls can be months long). If you decide like to me to look into private accommodation, a word of warning: the Berlin renting market has been become very competitive over the last few years. Flat rental prices have also been increasing as the city has 'boomed'. It is still reasonably cheap compared to other major European cities though. A normal price to pay for a WG should be around 320-370 Euros a month.

I tried to look for accommodation throughout first semester (so as to avoid the stress of doing this before finals) and to set up a swap with a German student. However I was ultimately with nothing when I arrived in Berlin, but the best way seems to be look when you get there anyway (so you can view flats). During the week after finals I started looking for a 'Zwischenmiete' at a WG. I spent quite a lot of time on WG Gesucht every day, emailing dozens of people, setting up flat viewings and getting finals results. So it was unfortunately not much of a week off.

It all paid off though! I eventually found a WG in Neukoelln with a few other Germans for the first three months and another WG in Prenzlauer Berg for the last month. Despite the difficulties I had in finding accommodation I would definitely recommend this mode of

living. I met so many people and new friends from different walks of life, improved my German tenfold and got quite a lot of insider tips to the city. I experienced living in both East and West Berlin. It is said that each part of Berlin is like a different city in itself, and I found this to be true. The people, the architecture and even the atmosphere are so varied. The West (especially Charlottenburg) has bigger houses/plots of land and is more family friendly. In comparison the East has communist style architecture and has been filled with an influx of young creative types over the last few years. The word 'gentrification' is a word you will hear a lot of in Berlin.

In general, I would say that I met more non-students than students during my time in Berlin. You will find that you arrive between semesters (end of one semester and during the semester holidays). This means that all the events to get to know other Charite Erasmus students were at the end of April rather than at the beginning of January.

## 2. Anmeldung

An important point to take into consideration when finding accommodation is Anmeldung., As a newcomer to Berlin you are required by law to go to 'Anmeldung' at the Buergeramt within 2 weeks. Some landowners do not allow Anmeldung, so be wary of this! You will need to make an appointment for this in advance online in any the Buergeramts in Berlin. I got an appointment the very next day, so you may not necessarily need to make this months in advance. You can go to any Buergeramt in any district in the city.

## 3. Paperwork!

The paperwork associated with an Erasmus exchange at the Charite is unfortunately quite frustrating. I had to write lots of emails to Manchester and also make numerous trips to the Berlin Erasmus office to get pieces of paper signed. This is your first introduction to German beaurocracy. If you need anything signed you need to make an appointment at the Sprechstunde which is only on a Tuesday afternoon! This also means printing out all forms, because scanned versions are not accepted. Our Erasmus grant also arrived quite late into the placement, so take this into consideration with your funding.

For every placement you need to get a Charite form signed off and a Manchester eform. At the end, you will then need to make an appointment with Frau Angelika Cernitori (make this well in advance). She will look at all your completed forms, (make sure to take copies of all your placement forms) and sign you off as having completed the semester. You will get various pieces of Charite headed paper but the most important one is the Manchester Certificate of Attendance form that you need to upload to myplacement.

## List of things to do

### Things to do

Tourist stuff - Brandenburger Tor, East Side Gallery, Reichstag, Fernsehturm (+ sign up for the free Kuppel tour- well worth the visit!)

Topographie of Terror- exhibition on site of old Stasi headquarters

DDR Museum

Pergamon Museum

Tempelhofer Flughafen

Potsdam day trip

Charite historical museum (history of the institution and all sorts of weird and wonderful medical specimens)

### Food and drink you must try

Curry wurst

Doner

Burgers (lots of choice)- Berlin Burger International (Neukoelln) or Buergermeister (Goerlitzer Bahnhof)

Haloumi magali

Club mate or Fritz Kola

#### Cafes (my favourite)

Café Pfortner (Wedding)

God Shot (Prenzlauer Berg)

Kalman's own (Prenzlauer Berg)

Coccola (Bergmannkiez)

An einem Sonntag in August (Prenzlauer Berg)

Ostfee (Prenzlauer Berg)

Spreegold (Alexander Platz)

### Places for a good view of the city

Potsdamer platz

Klunkerkranich bar (on the top of a shopping arcade)

Fernsehturm

Teufelsberg (one of the many hills made of rubble from the War)

### Berliner Dialekt (also known as the Berliner Schnauze)

In general the dialect is very easy to understand, but these terms might be useful!

Spaeti- corner shop

Jut – gut

Nischt- nicht

Krass- extreme in either a positive or negative connotation

Goerli- Goerlitzer Bahnhof

Schlesi- Schlesisches Tor  
Koti- Kotbusser Tor  
Prenzl' Berg- Prenzlauer Berg  
Kiez- Local district or block of houses

## **Placements**

### **Organising placements**

Berlin organized my first placement but none thereafter. This was left to us - so I started pretty early/ prepared a CV/ cover letter and emailed as many secretaries as I could in first semester. I found the emails on the respective department websites. You can apply to Charite and Vivantes hospitals. I did not know this so only ended up with placements in Charite hospitals. Once I had everything confirmed I made sure that both my Manchester and Berlin Erasmus learning agreements matched.

### **Dresscode**

In general terms, I would recommend bringing lots of warm layers. It is very cold when you arrive (especially when you are leaving at 7am to get to placement) and its not until the end of May when things really start warming up. The dress code in hospital is casual so bring jeans and Tshirts. Also I wish I had brought a new comfy pair of trainers, because that's all I was running around in for 4 months. In my hospitals I was always given a uniform of a Kittel and white trousers (so I didn't need to buy). Bare below the elbow also doesn't really exist. Initially wearing the uniform was strange but I got used to it fast and it's actually quite useful. I could stuff stethoscopes, pocket cards etc in the large Kittel pockets! In addition, I had to get used to introducing myself, because unlike the UK the doctors will probably not do this. You can either introduce yourself as a PJ (roughly equivalent of FY in UK) or as a Famulant, depending on how involved you want to get. Oh and I would recommend remembering to say good morning to everyone when you come in (it is considered rude not to do this even to complete strangers)- as I found out one morning from a rather irate nurse!

### **Access to computer system**

SAP is the Charite computer system, which combines lab results and letters. As a student you will most likely not get a log in straight away, but it's worth asking the secretaries if you can get a log on (since you might then be able to use it for 4 months). I wish I had done this at the beginning, because it would have saved me having to ask the doctors to sign you in every time you want to check something on the letters.

### **Time off**

I was working at times very long days, and time off can be short supply. First of all, PJ are entitled to a study day off a week (usually a Friday), which you can claim. In addition, we had Easter off and there are a couple of bank holidays in May.

### **Start times**

Days for medicine usually start at 8am and surgery is 7.30am.

### **Placement 1: Pneumologie und infektologie Charite Campus Benjamin Franklin**

This is a hospital which is a bit further out in South West Berlin (area called Stieglitz). It was built in the 1960s by the Americans and has a slightly older feel to it. However I found that compared to the other Charite hospitals it has a nicer more relaxed team atmosphere. In addition, there is a great Mensa and salad bar!

I had initially requested to have a infectious diseases placement, and was assigned by the Charite Erasmus office to 'Infektologie und Pneumologie'. On day 1 I was a little disappointed to realise that the placement was just respiratory medicine. However I had a very friendly small team and would recommend this placement for that reason. Initially it was all a bit of a culture shock, going from studying for finals to suddenly being on a general German medical ward full time, with little time off. My German required some improving and I have to admit I felt just a little lost on the ward! I also was initially unable to make much sense of the drugs that were prescribed as many are known by their trade names in Germany and they have different formularies. For example, metamizol (known as novalgin); a painkiller was prescribed for many patients. This drug is not used at all in the UK. My familiarity with everything of course got better with time, as things were explained to me and I began to pick up the language. I took part in the ward rounds, watched a number of bronchoscopies, took blood and clerked patients. Patients were in general very happy to have students talk and examine them. Generally they were patient when I stumbled over my words and interested when I mentioned that I was from England. Usually topics of conversation included: appreciation for the lovely English countryside and Brexit.

From the very beginning I was involved in writing the lengthy German discharge letters. This was very difficult initially but got easier with time. I would recommend the book 'Deutsch fuer Arzte und Aerztinnen' to help you get your head around German medical terminology. When there was not much to see, I was also able to watch cardioversions as we shared an office with the cardiologists. Days were generally quite long 8-4 but there was almost always something to do.

### **Placement 2: Neonatologie Charite Virchow Klinikum**

The Virchow Klinikum is based in Wedding, not far from the centre of Berlin and has a stunning old campus. Even if you are not based there, it is definitely worth a visit! I was expecting this placement to provide me with less opportunities to practice clinical skills. However I had heard from previous students that this could be quite a good placement to do if you are interested in paediatrics. Unfortunately my experience of this placement was quite difficult and I am not sure I would recommend this to future students.

Ward rounds were fairly long with little opportunity for teaching or input from myself, apart from the Chef Arzt Visite once a week, where I presented a patient. After this, I sometimes had the opportunity to take a history from a mother and assist in newborn checks for babies

delivered by C Sections. On the ward I also watched many different ultrasound scans being performed and learnt about nutrition for premature babies. The best part of the placement was undoubtedly when I got to go to A and E and took a history or did an examination of a newborn and presented to the doctor. Here I felt like I was actually being useful and also learnt a lot about common neonatal rashes and conditions! The other useful teaching was a general paediatric meeting once a week, where one of the doctors would present an interesting case.

There was little 'banter' on the ward and it was also my first real introduction to the infamous German medical hierarchy. One experience summed this up for me; I walked into a handover meeting, sat down next to the doctors already present and was laughed at for sitting in the wrong seat. Apparently all students and junior doctors had to sit in the seats across the table in a line, facing the Oberarzt and Chefarzt who were dressed in white on the chairs on the other side of the table (a bit like the Apprentice on TV). Quite alien if you are used to the flat structure on UK wards. Aside from this, I sometimes had the feeling some of the doctors had no idea what to do with me and the nurses were at times obstructive and quite protective of their children. Even whilst being assertive and trying to actively seek out opportunities, they would rarely let me assist with any procedure e.g blood taking. Overall however the days were relatively short 8-3 and allowed me plenty of time to explore the city in the afternoons.

### **Placement 3: Radiologie Campus Benjamin Franklin**

I really enjoyed this placement. I had great rapport with the team and the fact that there were other students meant that there was a good teaching culture. It became quite apparent that German medical students get a lot more detailed radiology teaching than us, and so I also learnt a lot from them.

My first week was spent in the CXR and bone reporting room. Here I was taught some useful tips about using PACS (they use the same system as in the UK) and the method and terminology needed to write reports. This was a brilliant introduction and towards the end I was writing reports independently and getting them checked by the Oberarzt. I spent the second week in CT where the process of CT with contrast was briefly explained to me. I was also able to help with some CT guided procedures and inserting cannulas. My favourite week was time spent in angiography and interventional radiology. It was really interesting and the team made me feel very welcome. By the end I was helping to insert PICC lines and scrubbing up for most other procedures.

Overall, it was a great varied placement with plenty of teaching opportunities. In addition there were whole department case presentations and meetings.

### **Placement 4: Rettungstelle Campus Charite Mitte**

I felt very fortunate that I got a spot to do a placement here (as I had heard from Charite students that it is notoriously difficult to get a place). They told me that if you want to apply, you need to do this at least 8 months in advance. Mitte is the main campus- a combination of old historic buildings and a sparkling modern 16 Storey 'Hochhaus' - a

prominent structure on the city skyline. Also two minutes from the Hauptbahnhof and the Brandenburger Tor; therefore the easiest hospital to get to by public transport.

This was my favourite placement and great preparation for FY1. I felt like I was a valuable member of the team and making a real difference to patient care, which was pretty satisfying. I was able to choose patients to clerk, examine, write the Erste Hilfe Schein and present my preferred management plan to the doctor. We discussed this and the doctor would then come through to discuss this with the patient. We would then both sign the discharge letter. I was able to revise a lot of common conditions on this placement which was really useful. Days were also a good length (8.30-3.30).

Initially, it was unnerving making management decisions (and having the doctor trust my clinical judgement). I began to get used to the feeling after a while and it made me really appreciate the responsibility we will have next year as FY1s. Perhaps, apart from student assistantship, I had never quite felt the full weight of this before. I also really put my German to the test when I presented a patient for review to the rheumatology professor over the phone. Luckily I managed to present the case well enough for him to agree to come over to see the patient. I had many valuable learning experiences there, including some brilliant ECG teaching (if you can try and buy yourself one of the ECG laminated pocket cards that all German doctors seem to have). Lehmanns next to Mitte campus is the perfect shop for all things medical. Again, medical students get taught ECG interpretation in much more detail than UK students.

In general I gained great respect for the doctors and nurses working in the department who were so calm in the face of at times, critically ill patients. It was at times a very stressful environment and I found that doctors and nurses alike, could be quite direct with each other. I had to develop a thick skin whilst there, and it was made quite clear to me that students are not there to be mollycuddled. The abruptness of communication might be perceived as rude in the UK. You will find though that two minutes later the same staff are talking about their holidays as if nothing had been said before. My advice to future students would be to not let yourself be put off!

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion I had a brilliant 4 months in Berlin. I now feel confident speaking in German-everyday language but also in a lot of the hospital terminology. As cliché as it also sounds going to a new country, meeting new people and adapting to a new culture means that you learn a lot about yourself. By the end I felt very at home in Berlin and wanted to stay longer. I will certainly miss the abundance of fresh bread and the continental relaxed feel to the city. The best days were those at the end of May with 21 degrees and everyone out on the streets drinking beer, eating cake or sunbathing in the parks.

I learnt a lot about the differences between the German medical system and the UK NHS.

- ☐ The doctor-patient relationship is more paternalistic
- ☐ There is less reliance on guidelines
- ☐ Medical staff are thinking about the cost of procedures and hospital stays (due to the insurance based healthcare system)



- ☐ Hospital departments are led by Chefarzte and doctors can stay many years in one department
- ☐ There is less rotation through specialities and less of a fixed training structure.
- ☐ Medical students go straight into speciality training after medical school
- ☐ Bigger hierarchy between doctors

A particular aspect that I really appreciate after these 4 months is the UK medical training structure. After this experience I also have a greater appreciation for the communication skills training and the NICE guidelines we rely on in the UK. In addition, I have to admit I have missed English politeness whilst here- something which I never thought I would notice. I have still to make my mind up about whether I would try to come back here for speciality training. As such though these 4 months, have certainly been a brilliant insight into German culture and medical practise and I am very grateful for having had this opportunity.

Bis bald Berlin!