



European Studies Programme Report

Berlin



01/02/2017 – 19/05/2017

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Why I chose to study on the European Studies programme

There are a number of reasons why I decided to study on the European Studies programme. First of all I am from Germany originally and have lived in Germany until the age of 15. As German is my first language I was very keen to maintain my language abilities. I did not just want to practice what I already know but also was keen on improving my medical German. Starting medical school I had the wish to pursue my career and settle in Germany.

From a personal point of view I have experienced the German healthcare system from a patient's point of view but wanted to gain further experience as a medical professional. Therefore having the language qualification and the experience of undertaking placements in Germany would have aided my decision.

When I started applying to universities Manchester stood out to me and the European option was one of the reasons why I ended up applying for Manchester as my first choice medical school.

Berlin as a destination appealed to me greatly as it is a world-renowned city and living out and experiencing the city, which I had never visited before was an exciting opportunity. All in all these were the reasons that made studying the European option programme so appealing to me.

Pre-Departure

At the end of your 4th year you are contacted to apply to one of the 3 cities you can visit as part of the Erasmus programme (Berlin, Homburg and Hannover). This is all done via the myplacement.ac.uk website (<https://studentmobility.manchester.ac.uk/>). I was allocated Berlin so the following report will focus on what I had to do for my specific placement, however I assume the procedure is very similar for other cities too.

Placements

You will need to complete a number of documents which the Erasmus office will outline. These include choosing which placement you are interested in. My first placement (Cardiology) was given to me by the Erasmus coordinator in Berlin. The other 3 placements you have to organize yourself. This might be daunting at first but the Erasmus coordinator in Berlin is really helpful and does reply fairly quickly to clarify anything.

Generally speaking it is recommended that you prepare a little academic CV in German to attach it to the email when applying for a placement (Famulatur). At the bottom of this report I have attached a good example email which I used.

In my experience the Charité website was helpful which has all the departments for all the campus and also contact details (<https://www.charite.de/en/>). Also it is to note that the Charité hospital is split up into 3 different campuses: Mitte, Benjamin Franklin and Virchow.

Erasmus Funding

This is around 320 euros/ month over the course of your stay. There is additional funding available for students who fulfill widening participation criteria. This is something the Erasmus funding coordinator will inform you about if you are eligible. It is very important to be timely with uploading the documents (learning agreement, funding application) on the MyPlacement dashboard to receive the money in a timely fashion. I am stressing this as some of these documents need to be signed by the team in Manchester and the team in the host nation which can take time if not done early. Before leaving, around December time, you will be able to pick up the "CashPassport" which is the account where the grant will be paid into. The money is sent in installments first one is around 3-4 weeks after arrival and then 2 installments will be paid to you following your return to the UK. This means make sure you have some form of cash or access to money whilst abroad and not rely heavily on the grant.

Semester Fee

During the 1st semester you will receive an email from the host university asking you to pay 250 euros for semester fees. This will entitle you to register for the semester and receive a student card, which doubles up as a travel card for the whole stay. I personally went to my bank and transferred the money into the account details which were provided to me by the Erasmus office in Berlin. This meant I saved time when I actually arrived and might be useful for you if you would like everything to be sorted before you arrive.

Pre-departure meetings and language tests

You will receive a lot of emails from the Erasmus team and whilst preparing for finals you can easily miss these. Just make sure you regularly check your email accounts and also ensure you do the pre-departure language test. An email link will be sent out this test will not take too long and your passmark was around 60%.

Flights and Accommodation

There is no accommodation offered at Berlin.. This may change year to year so always make sure to enquire about this. Some students have tried to look for accommodation once they arrived in Berlin end of January but this is a risky strategy. Berlin is a very large city so rooms tend to go fast. Contacting previous students via Facebook (there are a number of Facebook groups created) or using websites such as www.wg---gesucht.de can be very helpful. A lot of the landlords or estate agents are very happy to arrange skype viewings for places.

Kreuzberg, Moabit, Mitte and Charlottenburg are very central areas but can be pricey with rent around 500-600 euros per month. However, wherever you will live Berlin has excellent public transport and it is very easy to travel in and around the city.

In terms of flights make sure you start looking early. You have a choice of whether to leave straight away after your finals or to wait until results day. That is personal preference at the end of the day. Skyscanner.com is a very good website to compare flights and I would highly recommend it as you can get some really good deals from there.

What to do once you arrive.

Staying in contact

A very important aspect to consider is being contactable whilst you are away. So buying a sim card is very important. There are great local sim cards you can buy. Aldi talk was most competitive in terms of price and data and minutes offered. For around 10 euros a month. Sometimes it is worth to call your current network provider and ask if they have any European data bundles as this can work out cheaper sometimes.

Betriebsarzt termin (Occupational Health)

Again the Erasmus coordinator will prompt you and help you to arrange an appointment. This is essential to attend because without seeing occupational health you will not be permitted to undertake your placements. You will be given all the necessary information on where to go and what time but remember to take an envelope with your address and a stamp with you so they can send you your results via post.

Immatrikulation

There are a number of things you will have to bring to this appointment: 1. Passport (including a photocopy), EHIC card, proof of fee payment, certificate of arrival (Print it out via MyManchester) and a Meldebestätigung which you will receive at the Bürgeramt (more on that below). You will meet the Erasmus coordinator in the morning usually and complete the necessary paperwork with them. You will be issued with a temporary student card which allows you to use the public transport for 4 weeks. But to receive the proper card you will have to go to the Immatrikulation Office which is a 10 minute walk from the Erasmus office at a later day. Once you have undertaken the immatrikulation you will have to download a QR code from blackboard and bring this to the immatrikulation office to then receive your permanent student card. Just make sure that this office is not always open therefore ask for the opening times beforehand.

Bürgeramt

Make sure you make an appointment at any local authority, it does not have to be the one you are living in. Once you know your permanent address in Berlin you will need to register with the local council. An appointment can be booked via <https://service.berlin.de/dienstleistung/120686/>. Ensure you complete the right forms and understand the rules. It is a quick process if mistakes in the form can be avoided otherwise you might have to wait for another appointment and from my experiences the next available appointment can be 3-4 weeks away.

Overview of my experience living and working in the placement hospital and its surrounding area.

Work/Placements General Overview

You will be given a paper form which will need to be filled out for each of your placements. This confirmation of attendance will need to be shown at the end of your erasmus placement in order for you to gain your transcript for the European studies. It is important you mention this to your supervisor early on. In Germany doctors wear very casual clothes i.e jeans or sneakers but have to wear a lab coat. You usually are given a lab coat at the beginning of your placement which you will have to return at the end of your 4 weeks. There are also UCEX/UCMDs which you need to complete during your stay. A top tip would be let your supervisors know that you need these completing so they are aware of it and build a rapport with you. It can be sometimes difficult to get things signed off by doctors in Germany when they are not sure what it is. The same counts for the eForms placement form you will need to complete at the end of each placement.

Generally speaking the team on the ward consists of the Chefartz (Chief of Medicine), Oberartz (Consultant), Fachartz (registrar) and Assistentsartz (Junior Doctors). Your main role similar to UK placement are shadowing and assisting with job the junior doctor on the ward needs to complete.

1. Cardiology at Charite Campus Benjamin Franklin

Overall this was a very enjoyable first placement and I was welcomed by the team and was given responsibility to take bloods, take histories of patients. It was also great how I was encouraged to attend echocardiography sessions and practice this is something I have not done in the UK. Common procedures and conditions I encountered were: Cardiac catheterization, cardioversion for AF, murmurs and surgical repair, heart failure.

As with many placements there were opportunities to practice the routine day to day tasks as well like taking blood, participating in morning consultant led ward rounds and trust wide cardiology handover meetings. Clerking in patients and taking histories, putting cannulas in and discussing management with colleagues.

I was given a lot of freedom to do what met my learning needs and what I was interested in. This was a great bonus of this placement. The team did not know much about the Erasmus exchange so were not exactly sure what tasks I was meant to do. However the best way to explain it to the German doctors was that you are the equivalent of a student undertaking their "Praktikumsjahr" which is the 6th year of medical school and similar to a Student Assistantship at Manchester.

Generally my day used to start at 7am and I finished in the afternoon. This was dependent on what was happening on the day and if there were many jobs on the ward or in clinics.

2. ENT Charite Mitte

My experience here was very different to Benjamin Franklin. Mitte is a brand new hospital as they just recently opened. It is also known as the more academic hospital compared to the others. Here I got to attend theatre on a daily basis and also clinics

I was encouraged to attend variety of aspects of the ENT department such as clinics, the wards and on call duties. This gave me a great insight into the patient journey from first admission to surgery and follow up post surgery and an exposure to a variety of chronic and acute ENT disorders. These included head and neck cancers, chronic Sinusitis.

My favorite aspect of this placement was that I spent most days in theatres and assisting the consultant on many procedures. ENT Operation that took place: Neck dissections, Facial nerve surgery (Parotidectomy), Endoscopic procedures.

There were days where I was allocated to the On-Call doctors who covered the whole hospital and A&E department for all acute ENT illnesses. As Mitte was more academic the teaching was very good here too, most days I came in for 8am and stayed for around 5pm-6pm.

3. Radiotherapy Benjamin Franklin

This placement in Radiotherapy was split into 2 parts, 2 weeks were spent on the ward and 2 weeks were spent in the radiotherapy clinic and on-call duty. The ward jobs were very similar to what we are used to as medical students, except the added extras of the ward such as ordering chemotherapy, undertaking staging CTs and assisting in afterloading treatment of patients with gynae cancers.

4. Haematology Benjamin Franklin

This placement offered a lot more ward experience than my previous placements. I was allocated morning bloods, cannulas and also patients to clerk in each day. The team of doctors welcomes me and offered a lot more ad hoc teaching in between seeing patients which was great.

Living

I managed to get my own flat and lived in Moabit/Tiergarten, which was very central and located within 10min of the central station and town centre. I had 2 underground stations close by (U Birkenstrasse & S Westhafen) and also bus stop within 2min walking distance.

Great places to visit.

Berlin is a great place for foodies. It has a lot of local shops and cafes that will definitely keep you busy for the full 4 months. Excellent areas to visit would be Haeckischer Markt and Kotbusser Tor if you would like some Turkish food. I found using Tripadvisor and also the doctors on the ward what food places they go to really helpful.

One of the must go places is Mustafas Gemuese Kebab, you may have to wait 1-2 hours in the queue but it is well worth. It is known as the best doner in Germany and after tasting it I can only agree.

For shopping and generally going out I recommend Potsdamer Platz or Kuhdamm these are great shopping streets with large shopping centres so you can shop until you drop.

The nicest tourist attractions I found were the Berlin Fernsehturm you have to pay 15 euro for entry but you will get a stunning view of the whole of Berlins skyline which makes it worth it.

Museum island was one of my favourite areas in Berlin. It is perfect to just go for a walk on a nice day but also to visit the many museums that are located there. If you are a student the entry is fairly cheap. Other museums to visit would be the DDR museum and the Jewish memorial site, this is free to visit.

There are the obvious tourist places such as the Brandenburger Tor and the Reichstag which are lovely to see too.

If you feel like taking weekend trips Berlin is great for that too. Thanks to the very central location and great train and coach connections it is possible to do weekend trips to Prague or Potsdam. These are places I personally visited and would thoroughly recommend. Goeuro.com is a great website to buy tickets using paypal and also Flixbus.de a simple way to book coach tickets throughout Germany and the rest of Europe for a really cheap price.

What you have learnt on the placement with regard to any differences to UK hospitals and practice, the medical training programme, the contrasting medical cultures.

I have now been on a number of rotations at hospitals in Berlin (Cardiology, ENT, Radiotherapy, Haematology) since the end of January. This has given me a new perspective on the german healthcare system.

As someone who was born and grew up in Germany until I was 16 I thought I would know a lot about the system. However, I only experienced it as a citizen and have now realized how different it is compared to the NHS. Working 5 days a week and experiencing both the private aswell as the public medical care gave me a great insight. I have split my reflection into different themes: Medical, social and personal aspects.

Medical

- Healthcare System generally
 - Germany's health care system has two main types of health insurance
 - "Statutory Health Insurance" known as sickness funds
 - "Private Health Insurance"
 - There are certain benefits you get with a private insurance such as medication, single beds, less waiting time to receive investigations.
 - A big problem in my eyes was that both public and private patients were treated under one roof which created ethical issues regarding waiting times for investigations, bed space and also management plans
- Medical education
 - I had the chance to speak and even teach local medical students.
 - Berlin has a similar PBL approach as Manchester but I have been told that many universities still prefer the traditional route of strict lecture based teaching.
 - Personal development such as portfolio the way I know it does not exist, which was surprising. It later became clear to me there are certain disadvantages to having no formal portfolio (even after graduation) as there is no incentive to teach juniors. Something I quickly realized that there are only a handful of doctors that teach younger students and the majority just don't unless they are scheduled/forced to teach by the university.
- Clinical governance
 - I asked doctors during my placement whether I could engage in undertaking an audit on the ward or in clinics.
 - Students or doctors don't normally participate in clinical improvement audits. I can just think this is probably linked to not being any incentive in form of a portfolio.

Social

- Communication
 - Between patients and doctors
 - A very different approach and relationship between doctors and patients in Germany. The doctors are very straight to the point which I thought could be perceived as very blunt or rude. Something as a Manchester student that is always a buzzword is ICE. None of the psychosocial questions regularly get asked when clerking patients. In my opinion on some of the wards the clinical care was just that, very clinical and cold. It was mainly the nurses that showed compassion.
 - Patients don't seem to mind this approach as they are used to it
 - Although I have gotten very positive feedback on my communication skills and building rapport both by German colleagues and patients. There seems to be a contrast on what is taught even at medical school level as well.
 - Doctors between each other
 - This straight to the point style of communication is also the case between colleagues. This is of course beneficial in effective

communication and a major advantage when presenting patients and handing over.

How you have gained from this experience in terms of i) linguistic development, ii) Inter cultural understanding, and iii) in terms of your ideas and future plans.

I was able to put my german medical knowledge under test and it was great practice to take patients histories and also interact with german doctors. This is very different to practicing in the classroom with friends and other students. I am a native german speaker but living in the UK for the past 10 years I noticed how my german became a little rusty. Therefore it was nice to be completely surrounded by the german language (TV, News, Work)

It was definitely a worthwhile experience which I thoroughly enjoyed and it has majorly shaped my future planning. I am very open to the idea now to possibly working in Germany further down the line.

Any practical issues that future students on this placement should know about.

I would say it is very important to stay on the ball early on. I know it can be difficult during the preparation time for finals but try to organize placement early on and regularly check your emails.

Good contact is: Charite Erasmus Office: international-students@charite.de

- Charite website
- WG Gesucht,
- Google MAPS for public transport check commuting times for hospitals
- European Health insurance card and register with a Hausarzt as soon as possible ([artzte gesucht.de](http://artzte-gesucht.de) good website)
- PostOffice Travel money card or ask your bank for advice credit card etc)
- Goeuro (good for train tickets and can pay using paypal)
- Big tip is that a lot of places use cash only. A lot of shops, bars, restaurants will only accept cash.
- Calling a taxi very easy just call 030 – 202020
- Download VPN so you can watch UK TV shows online i.e BBC Iplayer
- Make copies of everything! And remember to take your attendance papers at the end of your Erasmus stay to the Erasmus office to receive your transcript!

Example Email:

Sehr geehrte Frau / Herr ,

ich heiße und bin ein/e Erasmusstudent/in der Charité und möchte gerne in der Zeit vom bis bei Ihnen in der Klinik in der Abteilung famulieren. Meine Deutschkenntnisse sind sehr gut / gut / befriedigend.

Über eine positive Antwort würde ich mich sehr freuen.

Mit freundlichen Grüßen

Name