

UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER

European Studies Report

Université Paris Descartes (Paris V)

30/1/2017 - 19/5/2017

Why did I choose to study on the European Studies programme?

I chose to study on the European Studies programme as I wanted to become proficient at another language. I holiday a lot in France, I love the country and culture, and I wanted to develop the skills that I had learnt throughout my school and college years. For these reasons I enrolled onto the European Studies programme.

I studied French at A-level but had a break of 3 years before starting the European Studies programme, for this reason I felt very behind a lot of the time during classes. All of the French tutors and the other students were very supportive during the course and I found myself enjoying classes more as time went by. Throughout my medical degree I found it difficult to balance the extra workload involved in preparing for the French classes and in revising for the French exams; however I really enjoyed the little break from medicine that it provided.

I had always loved Paris when I had visited for long weekends and so knew from first year that I wanted to do my Erasmus placement there. Of the universities in Paris I decided to put Université Paris Descartes as my first choice as I specifically wanted to carry out a placement in l'Hôpital Necker-Enfants Malades as I am interested in paediatrics and this hospital is particularly well known globally for its paediatric specialties. I was very pleased with the two specialties to which I was assigned and loved both hospital placements.

Living in Paris

Accommodation

I decided to go through [airbnb.com](https://www.airbnb.com) to find my accommodation. I found a suitable place to stay easily through this website, however the host cancelled the booking a month before I was due to go out. Fortunately, I managed to find alternative [airbnb](https://www.airbnb.com) accommodation quite easily but it meant that I had to move apartments twice as the alternatives that I found could only do part of the stay. Initially I was dreading having to pack and drag my luggage around Paris; however it worked out really well. All of my apartments were lovely, with helpful hosts, and I got to experience living in three different areas of Paris. After speaking to other students it's clear that using [airbnb](https://www.airbnb.com) is slightly more expensive (it cost me between 180 and 200€/month) however I loved the apartments that I was in and would definitely go down the same route if I was to do something similar again.

From my experience, if you were to decide to use [airbnb](https://www.airbnb.com), I don't think that booking accommodation months in advance is very beneficial. I arranged my accommodation quite far in advance; however 50% of it fell through. I found that when I turned up at one apartment the owner would ask whether I wanted to stay longer, so even if I hadn't booked in advance I would have still had some really nice places to live in.

Another student stayed at the Cité Internationale Universitaire de Paris (CIUP) which he found a fun place to live. Even if you don't plan to stay in a halls-type accommodation it may be beneficial to apply for a room at CIUP just in case you don't find anything else suitable. You can apply online and apparently it's best to apply a few months in advance. I think that everyone else that I know of decided to use [airbnb](https://www.airbnb.com).

Travel

The public transport links in Paris are great. The metro is very convenient and I would definitely recommend getting a monthly Navigo pass which gives you access to all 5 zones and the buses. Some of the hospitals reimburse part of the cost of your pass too which makes it 100% worth buying one.

With regards to travelling outside of Paris, the train network is really good, as are some bus providers, such as the Ouibus. There is also a car-share service that is useful, safe and cheap called BlaBlaCar. Apparently the car-share service exists in the UK too, but I'd never heard of it before living in Paris. The Erasmus group, EIAP, organise lots of day trips and weekends away which make travelling outside of Paris really easy. There are lots of long weekends in May and the weather is nicer so that's a great time to travel around. The French students get 1 week of holiday during each 4 month placement, so if you want to travel you can take 1 week of holiday too.

Finances

Paris is expensive, so it's best to prepare for that. You can get paid a small monthly salary from some (if not all) of the hospitals so that helps a bit. In order to get paid you have to set up a bank account which can be tricky if you're staying in an airbnb property as you have to ask for your host to provide you with documents which some may be hesitant to provide. I also got a Supercard from Travelex which was a card that linked to any UK bank accounts of my choice (I linked it to my UK current account). My Supercard meant that all point of sale transactions had no extra charges whatsoever. It still, like the Erasmus MasterCard, charged for withdrawals from an ATM; however I just used my French account to get cash out and paid for almost everything that I possibly could by card.

Hospital Placements

Pédiatrie-hémato-immuno at Hôpital Necker-Enfants Malades

The patients on this placement suffered from very rare, genetic immunological conditions. The ward was split into outpatient and inpatient wings, and I was based in the inpatient side. Most of the patients were admitted for diagnostic investigations and bone-marrow transplants. Although most of the conditions were so rare that I will never see them again I found them really interesting to learn about and it really reiterated and further developed my interest in both paediatrics and haematology/immunology. Despite the specialised nature of the placement I felt like I also learnt a lot about general paediatrics, including development, growth and nutrition. This placement also provided me with daily opportunities to examine children and to speak to the parents and take histories.

My placement on this ward began a month after the French students had started due to the way the Manchester course is organised. I didn't find this to be too much of a problem as everyone was very welcoming and introduced me well to the team. The French students took me under their wing and filled me in on where and when the teaching took place and really guided me with what was expected of me on the ward. The internes were also very kind and were definitely more lenient with me than the other students.

During this placement the other externes and I were assigned patients as they were admitted to the ward. Once assigned a patient we would follow them and look after them during their hospital stay. This would involve filling in their 'dossier', examining them every day, chasing up results and investigations, and clarifying aspects of the history with the family. On a weekly MDT ward round with the chefs de service, internes, nutritionists and social workers we had to present what was happening with our patients during that week. I also had teaching with the other externes on general paediatrics 2 mornings per week, and on 1 morning per week I had small group teaching with my supervisor and the other externes on my placement. During the small group teaching the externes, including me, would take it in turns to present a case and a critical analysis of a primary research article. I only had to be in hospital from 9am until 1pm Monday to Friday so that left me lots of time to experience Paris. It was a nice atmosphere on the wards with the internes, externes and senior doctors all behaving as friends. Everyone was always interested in getting a coffee and there were always pastries and chocolates hanging around the internes' offices. These helped with the long MDT ward rounds.

The main difficulty that I had during this placement was speaking on the phone. I didn't know the etiquette and I found it really difficult to understand people. I also often found that I was directed to different people on the phone over and over again until I'd forgotten what I was calling for.

Réanimation médicale at Hôpital Saint-Joseph

During this placement I saw a wide variety of pathologies and found that I learnt a lot. The internes were great at explaining the situation with the patients and discussing each aspect of their care thoroughly, so I really felt that I got a greater understanding of lots of different pathologies and management plans from this placement. The other doctors on the ward really encouraged the externes to ask questions and contribute to discussions within the staff meetings. The senior doctors were always around the ward area and were very approachable with questions. If they saw me looking a bit confused or lost they would always come over and check that everything was ok. I was encouraged to feel part of the team and really loved this placement.

I started this placement along with the French students. This was better as it meant that I had a very clear idea of my role within the team from the start. I also felt that I was just one of the other students and that I was being treated exactly the same as them which was good. After our induction to the ward the chef de service took us to complete our registration with the hospital and collect our white coats. This was great as it was one less administrative thing to worry about. L'Hôpital Saint-Joseph is a relatively small hospital in the south of Paris in the 14th arrondissement with a real community feel to it so I felt very comfortable there.

A typical day started at 8:30am with a handover from the 'garde' team. I then either had some teaching or went straight to the ward to see the patients who I was assigned to. I had to look up all imaging and blood results and write them on a big 'pancarte'. I would then find the 'interne' who was looking after the patient and discuss the management plan and other aspects of care with them. I was then required to examine the patients and write in the notes my findings and what the plan was. I then had to present my patients on the ward round to the other externs and the doctors before finishing for the day.

I was also required to do a few weekend days (astreintes) and on-call shifts of 24 hours (gardes) during this placement. Although this initially sounded daunting to me I actually learnt a lot during these shifts. The weekend day shifts were almost identical to the week days. The only difference was that there were only 2 externes on the ward so we each had more patients to look after. During a typical garde shift it would be my job to do the administrative tasks, such as to put together a file for the patient and to write all of the patient's history on the pancarte, and to do an initial assessment of any new admissions to the ward. This would include a full examination and maybe some basic investigations such as an ECG. There was a basic but comfortable 'chambre de garde' for the reanimation externe to use to sleep during the night of these shifts. The amount of sleep I would get would depend on how many new admissions there were and whether there were any emergencies through the night, but it would generally be around 4-5 hours. I would take a phone with me when I went to sleep and if I was needed either the chef de service or the interne would call me. The garde shifts were great and I would recommend doing some if you get the opportunity.

Medicine in France vs. the UK

Education

Medical School in France is very different to that in the UK. The typical medical degree in France is 6 years long, at the end of which the students have to sit their concours to become an interne in whichever specialty they choose to pursue directly (which is determined via a ranking process). I understand that anyone can enrol into the first year of medical school at the end of which they sit a competitive examination which determines who will progress onto the next year of study. Typically 15% of students progress into the second year. They then have 2 years of pre-clinical study followed by 3 years of clinical placements during which they are referred to as externes. During the medical degree it seems that there is a lot of focus on scientific knowledge and not so much of a focus on practical skills, examinations and communication. Students tend to sit an EMQ exam after each hospital placement (every 4 months) on a specific specialty, and the final concours is a written exam. They currently have no OSCE-style exams. After speaking to the other students on the ward it sounds as though medical school in France is a much more gruelling process than in the UK. I felt that the other externes on my ward definitely had a greater knowledge of the basic science behind pathologies; however I felt that I had an edge when it came to examination and history taking. Interestingly, my fellow students, who were in their 4th year, were required to attend simulation sessions in English to help them to develop their medical English. The senior doctors are very keen on pushing the students and younger doctors to read the New England Medical Journal regularly and keep up to date with new research. I think that the need for the students to study medical English has partly to do with this, as well as to do with communicating with colleagues internationally.

During their hospital placements the students in France tend to have more of a specified role for which they receive a small salary. They typically have quite administrative roles and also act as assistants to the internes by examining patients, updating the notes, ordering investigations and chasing up results. The students are considered as integral members of the team and are expected to attend handovers and team meetings. They are also encouraged to give their opinions and ideas regarding patient diagnosis and care when decisions need to be made.

Culture

The French healthcare system works very differently for the UK. The majority of healthcare in France is publically funded, with a percentage needing to be paid by the patient themselves. I believe that patients pay a reduced rate for the healthcare they have received and then they claim back the majority from the state later.

I found that the culture within the team in the hospital environment was very different to that in the UK. I found that everything was much more relaxed. The relationships between externes, internes and chefs de service was great. The hierarchy was respected however everyone behaved as friends. I found that meal breaks were very well respected on my wards and commonly the whole team of doctors would be sent off by the chef de service to have a 1 hour lunch break. They would also start the day by having breakfast and a coffee together which I thought was nice.

The greatest difference in healthcare provision that I noticed was the dynamic between the patient and doctor. I found that interactions were very much led by the doctor in quite a paternalistic way. Options were not particularly discussed with patients, and the doctor would make decisions and tell the patient what that decision was, rather than it being an open dialogue between the two parties. I also got the impression at times that patients didn't feel comfortable in asking questions and telling doctors of their concerns. Doctors are viewed quite highly in the eyes of the public in France, almost how I can imagine that doctors were seen 30 years ago in the UK, so a certain hierarchy appears to exist.

Linguistic development

My French was not great at the start of my placement so I was really nervous about starting. However, as my confidence grew and I used French more and more I definitely improved. I also used the Erasmus OLS+ online courses to practice grammar and vocabulary and found it really helpful. The textbook 'Words – Science de la Santé' was very useful for on the wards. Unfortunately, outside of the hospital most of my social interactions were in English, therefore I tried to speak as much French as I could during my shifts. The other externes were friendly and very easy to talk to and in getting friendly with them I was able to practice my conversational French. I also made sure that when I watched television it was in French and that I listened to the French radio. I enjoyed reading different French books which were available at the apartments that I stayed in. I think that in being immersed in the language it is difficult to not make a significant improvement.

During my second placement the chef de service liked me to present my patient in English every now and then to help the team practice their English and get used to hearing English medical terms. I actually found it very hard to do this as I had learnt all of the terms in French and had become so used to presenting in French. It is common for people to want you to speak to them in English in order for them to practice their English so it's important that you try and strike a bargain so that you get to use your French as well.

Ideas and future plans

Although I enjoyed both of my placements in Paris and the lifestyle in France, I don't think that I would like to work as a doctor there in the future. This is partly due to the training programme,

including the concours exam which I would have to sit to work in France, and partly due to the differences in the healthcare system which I discussed above. I will, however, definitely be returning for holidays.

Useful information and contacts

- The EIAP group were really good so I'd definitely recommend joining it and attending some events. It was a great way to meet people and to explore Paris and France. They would have events or trips almost every weekend and during the week too, so there was always something to do if you fancied it.
- Affordable yoga and fitness is an organisation (www.affordableyogafitness.com) which provides lots of yoga, bootcamp and ballet barre classes throughout the week. Gym memberships can be super expensive so I found this a great alternative. I got an introductory offer of 30 Euros for 30 days of unlimited classes which was great.
- Let's Run Paris is a great running organisation. The members meet every Monday evening to run a 10K route and every Saturday morning to run a longer route around Paris. Everyone is friendly and it's free and a great way to explore the city. They have a group on Facebook that you can join to get information about all of the runs. They also have social nights too.
- If you're a keen runner, the Paris marathon and half-marathon take place during April, so I'd recommend signing up for one.
- The French students can take 1 week of holiday during each 4 month placement, so be sure to ask your supervisor for your week off too.
- I would suggest that you consider buying the recommended textbook 'Words – Sciences de la Santé'. I found it to be very useful on the wards.
- The international coordinator at Paris Descartes was very helpful so don't hesitate to contact them if you have any problems or questions (Erichetta Mazerat - erichetta.mazerat@parisdescartes.fr).
- With regards to using a mobile phone in France I found it very easy as my UK mobile phone contract is with Three who have a 'Feel At Home' initiative where you can use your normal contract (excluding 4G and hot spot) in lots of countries, including France, at no extra charge. For this reason I didn't need to get a new contract whilst I was away.