



MAY 2017

# ERASMUS IN LYON

UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER



## Why I chose to study on the European Studies programme?

The European studies placement was one of the main reasons why I chose Manchester Medical School. I am bilingual and have always loved learning French since high school and would definitely have tried to pursue it some way or another. Fortunately, the European studies programme provides a really good structure, with the opportunity to spend 4 months in the host country and also opens up many prospects career wise. Furthermore we sit the DALF before we fly out which means, although it does not feel like it, we have a decent level of French before the placement.

During the Christie Cancer Care Block in 5<sup>th</sup> year there is the option to do an elective abroad or in France, I decided to do an elective in the UK because I couldn't afford to abroad. I would highly recommend organising one abroad either in France or a francophone country if this is possible. I was worried that this may impact my learning for finals as there are a lot of teaching sessions during this block but I studied hard to make sure I had covered the same things and did not feel disadvantaged in the slightest.

## Lyon

I chose Lyon because it was the southernmost university and so a warmer climate but also because it was situated close to the mountains and the rest of Europe. I also thought the previous reports were glowing and our French tutor came from Lyon and highly recommended it. I also chose it because I thought it would be less busy and less expensive than Paris which was my other main choice. I also chose Lyon Est over Lyon Sud because it is more centrally located. Although I think that the Erasmus experience would probably be great in any city I highly recommend Lyon because it seems to be a city without being a city; this is difficult to explain but it is a sentiment shared by a lot of people here. Lyon itself is not very big, it is a very clean city and the rivers are a central attraction, there are also a lot of students here which always engenders an interesting and stimulating environment. It is also very well situated in France because within hours you can reach the sea or the mountains. I did not travel as much out of France as I had intended to mainly because there was so much to do in Lyon and surrounding cities/ towns.

## Accommodation

Initially I wanted to live in a studio flat or colocation however I could not find one within my budget and so decided to live in university accommodation. I am so grateful that I did because I have made so many friends which I wouldn't have in a studio flat. I also was able to improve my French by speaking with my flat mates and because there are many people sharing one kitchen there is the opportunity to meet lots of people different people. The uni accommodation is low cost and is also eligible for a bursary from the French government called CAF (not all private rented accommodations are eligible) although this is quite a chore to obtain. The accommodation is clean and very close to the Parc de la Tete d'Or which is brilliant.

I had an ensuite room which was what I wanted and fortunately there is a lot of storage in the rooms.

Unfortunately there were up to 30 rooms to one kitchen, although only about 15 people use the kitchen regularly. The kitchen was also very basic with no utensils, no oven on our floor and no appliances. However I managed to pick up a kettle for only 10 euros from Carrefour for my all-important tea. Although the residence was technically in a residential area called Villeurbanne outside of Lyon, with the excellent public transport travel to the hospital, uni or city centre was very easy. I also think that most of the accommodation is situated similarly. Unfortunately some students did complain of bedbugs however we didn't suffer from this problem. Overall I would highly recommend living in university accommodation because it was inexpensive and mainly because of the friends I made and how this contributed to my overall experience. Although they try to charge you the whole of January's rent even though we arrive towards the end. I was told however that we should have kicked up a fuss to avoid this.

I have thoroughly enjoyed living in Lyon; it is a very cosmopolitan city, it is not too big and is very well linked up therefore does not feel huge. The rivers and river edge are beautiful and my favourite part of the placement has to be cycling along the quai in good weather. The weather is overall much better than Manchester although sometimes there are rainy spells.

## Transport in Lyon

The public transport is very efficient, clean and regular. A subscription of around 30 euros per month gives access to the tram, metro and bus. There is also the Velov system which are public bikes, this costs 15 euros for the whole year and allows up to one hour of use free of charge. This was my favourite form of travel depending on the weather/ route because there are multiple stations around Lyon and it is a very cycle friendly city.

## Travel outside of Lyon

It is quite expensive to get to the airport unfortunately. The trains are cheaper if booked in advance. The alternative is Ouigo train or Ouibus coach, this is a cheap way to travel quite far. I used them to travel to Marseille, Annecy, Chamonix, Avignon, Torino and Nimes. It is also possible to travel to other European countries with Ouibus however these tend to be very long journeys.

## Practical Life

I found that food shopping in Carrefour and other supermarkets was quite expensive in comparison to England, however Leader Price and Lidl etc are cheaper alternatives. There are also multiple markets throughout the city on the weekend and sometimes mid week which have much better offers for fruit and vegetables, and pretty much anything you could want really!

It is necessary to open a bank account in France to apply for CAF, there is usually a long waiting list and so it should be one of the first things on your to do list on your arrival. The CAF will contribute 1/3 of your rent per month after the first month. This meant that I did not pay my last month's rent as it all came in together. It can be quite confusing but don't let that put you off because it is worthwhile. Moreover all the other students in the residence will have applied and so it is worthwhile to ask for help and in this way get to know people. There is also a CAF office at Part Dieu which is very helpful and you can go without an appointment, it will be necessary to bring a copy of your birth certificate with you for CAF. Unfortunately if you sublet you are not eligible for CAF.

Everybody requires an ID photos in France so come well prepared, you will also need some booster vaccinations so it is ideal to make the occupational health appointment for this well in advance because finals are a stressful time and it would be easy to forget this. Also unfortunately the stereotype is real and there is a lot of paperwork to be completed in France and multiple insurances need to be taken out therefore be prepared and try to keep on top of all the paperwork sent to you before the placement.

We had French classes which weren't always that useful but were an excuse to socialise with other Erasmus and learn some French of course!

## Food

Although Lyon is the gastronomic capital of France, as a muslim I found it very difficult to eat halal traditional French food i.e. without alcohol or non halal meat because the "bouchon" which is a typical Lyonnais restaurant is heavily based on meat. Fortunately there were alternatives although I had to look hard for them, my favourite was Le Kitchen Café which was a very lovely restaurant serving a well-priced three course lunch menu. It was the best restaurant I went to because it was a very small artisanal place, everything was made fresh on site, they changed the menu every week and a lot of thought had gone into the menu. They also make their own brioches and desserts and the breakfast menu is great too. However the reason I mention it is because they adapted the meal according to my dietary requirements and that was very rare to find.

## French Healthcare System

It was very interesting to see the differences between the UK healthcare system and the French. The healthcare system here is more complicated compared to the UK in that it is a mixed state provided and insurance dependant service. The state sets public rates for services for which patients must pay and are then reimbursed about 70% by the state, an insurance policy then covers the last 30%, and for certain groups of patients the state takes complete charge of cost. I found that this essentially provides good basic universal cover for everyone at an affordable price, it also means that patients have access to more costly treatments sooner in comparison with the UK. There seemed to be greater funding for the healthcare system, there were also more hospitals, doctors and nurses which resulted in lesser waiting times. However I feel that this creates a lot of unnecessary paperwork which occupies a lot of the doctor's time and effort.

Overall medicine is quite paternalistic and hierarchical in France compared with the UK, within the team although there is good teamwork and camaraderie there is a clear order of importance. Furthermore the general consensus is that “the doctor knows best”, in this way it is not as patient centred as the UK. Patients are often expected to undress down to their underwear for minor examinations which is not common practise in the UK and sometimes feels a little excessive. I found that doctors don't accommodate for non-french speakers at all, family are used as translators or are called. Medical interpreters are rarely booked or called which did cause some communication problems, I found this contrary to what we have been taught at home and detrimental to patient care.

Although there are many similarities the training programme is different and medical students have a greater role in hospital in France compared to the UK. I found this beneficial as they have an actual role in the team and this engenders a good team environment. Medical school is six years here and at the end students sit an exam to determine which speciality they will enter and enter training directly therefore training is shorter. I find the training programme limits students because this limits their exposure to other more general rotations unlike us which results in a weaker general knowledge base and interns refer to other specialities too quickly because they are not comfortable treating conditions outside of their specialty. I generally found the public and the health care system to be over-medicalised in comparison with the UK in that they expected more investigations and treatment and also received them.

## Hospital Placements

We were sent a list in advance to choose hospital placements along with multiple other documents, I would advise completing all these documents well in advance to avoid any last minute delays and minimise any extra stress during the run up to exempting exams. It is advisable to research which vaccinations are required prior to leaving. Unfortunately Erasmus students are not paid for their placement.

## University

In Lyon we were also given the option of free 3 hourly French classes every Thursday at the medical school. This was slightly confusing as we arrived towards the end of the first semester thereby missing the initial classes and we are then joined by the second semester Erasmus shortly after. However there are some other students who overlap like us. The lessons were sometimes useful, the Prof would start by teaching us some slang or language familier, then move on the main bulk and finish with some grammar. Unfortunately we had the lessons in an odd order and so missed the initial lessons which were relevant to starting placement in a French hospital and would have been very helpful at the start. Overall the lessons were a bit hit and miss although the prof was lovely however they weren't compulsory and it was a really good way of meeting other Erasmus students. I also found out that not all medical schools offer French lessons.

## Endocrinology

My first placement was at Hopital Louis Pradel, a specialist cardiology and endocrinology hospital and part of a group of hospitals in Bron called Groupement Hospitalier Est which lasted for 4 weeks. The average travel time to Bron was about 1 hour from my accommodation. My supervisor was Professor Moulin who was very kind, took an interest in me as a student and gave me some good advice on places to travel to! I was in a large group of friendly externs (year 3 – 6 medical students) supervised by several interns. I attended outpatients for 2 weeks with the Chefs (consultant), the day ward for 2 weeks and I had weekly teaching sessions. Outpatient's was interesting and a good way to ease into the environment as I was observing more and was able to become more accustomed with the language. The consultants were very kind and interested in me and asked me to do clinical examinations so I did feel useful at times. However this was a bit lonely at first and so I was glad to be on the day ward and mingle with the other externs. On the day ward (Hopital du jour) we were expected to take a history, perform an examination, up date the patient's medical notes and perform an ECG and a lying and standing BP. There were quite a lot of medical students on this placement which meant we soon finished what we had to do and had to hang around to see the patient again with the consultant. However this was beneficial for me as it meant that I could ask the externs for help and was able to chat with them. I saw a lot of diabetic patients (type 1 and type 2) and hypercholesterolaemia patients. It was interesting to see these patients have regular yearly check-ups at the day hospital to monitor their treatment. I soon learned that the French do not use generic drug names unlike us and started learning the brand names.

## Rheumatology

My second placement was 6 weeks long at Hopital Edouard Herriot with Professor Chapurlat. HEH is situated at the university campus and so only half an hour commute. I spent 3 weeks on the Hopital du Jour and 3 weeks on the ward. During hopital du jour we saw patients who were coming in for their regular biological agent infusions for AS or RA, we also went to some outpatient clinics and intra-articular joint injections. It was very busy with up to 20 patients to be seen in one day and so we saw very little of the intern and the ward wasn't very frequented by the consultants. I was with 2 other French externs who were very helpful, initially I shadowed them and then started seeing patients by myself and writing in the patient's notes. Unfortunately this first part was rather repetitive but I then found the ward was much more interesting with more varied patients, more contact time and teaching from the interns and consultants and I was also able to follow the consultant ward round.

I really enjoyed the team atmosphere in rheumatology because the interns were very lovely and helpful, the consultants were also very involved. This was my busiest placement and so I was in a lot and also learned a lot. However I was slightly disappointed in that the rheumatologists didn't deal with vasculitides and connective tissue disease because these were seen by General Internal Medicine and it is something I am very interested in, I could perhaps have tried harder to spend some time in General Internal Medicine.

## Dermatology

My last placement was also at HEH in Dermatology with Professor Julien, I rotated between surgery, outpatient consultations and teaching. I was in surgery in the mornings for one week with Dr Ducroux who was very lovely and involved me in the surgery. It was mostly minor surgery however I also observed some of the nasal reconstruction she performed for basal cell carcinomas which was really interesting. Outpatients was interesting as I got to see a wide variety of skin conditions which I haven't had much exposure to in the UK. I also found the teaching useful as we were asked to describe photos of skin conditions and suggest a diagnosis every Thursday morning. It was also a relaxed placement and so I was able to go traveling during the warmer months.

## Linguistic Development

Before I came I was slightly concerned about French speaking skills and people still have difficulty understanding my accent sometimes however I can definitely say that my French has improved a great deal. Through speaking with patients, doctors, medical students, my friends at my hall of residence and my Erasmus friends. It was great being able to practice with these varied groups as my friends taught me slang and *verlan*, I learnt medical French in the hospital and I was able to practice with people who had a similar level of French with the Erasmus students. I initially found it very difficult to follow a group conversation with the French students however this greatly improved with time although now I am able to follow it well and contribute occasionally. I think it is important not to stress about language development but to have fun as you learn and living in the host country is a probably the way of learning because you don't even realise that you are, you absorb so much and as we already have the C1 we have a decent grasp of the language even if it may not seem so. I really enjoyed my language development in France and it reminded me of all the reasons why I chose to study it. I think my listening which was originally my weakest skill probably because I am exposed to it the least improved the most closely followed my speaking which was my second weakest. I especially found the other Erasmus students very inspiring because they all spoke English fluently in addition to learning French. Now I'd like to continue developing my French skills and learn another language!

## Intercultural Understanding

It was interesting to see the differences in culture and understand them in greater detail but ultimately I learned that "we have far more in common than which divides us". In essence we are all the same and have the same fears, hopes and dreams even if they may be dressed differently. We may have different expectations as well but even these stem from a common thread. I have met some lovely people and I hope to stay friends with them and meet them in England. I will of course visit Lyon regularly as well I imagine because after doing an Erasmus there it does have a special significance. I also recognise that a lot of this is due to the fact that we have just finished a very stressful time and are ready to relax but it is not entirely due to that.

## Future Plans

I do not see myself working or training in France because I am satisfied with the experience this placement has given, I do not wish to sit the concours (national exam at the end of 6<sup>th</sup> year to choose my specialty) and I prefer our healthcare system. However, I have made Mauritanian and Tunisian friends and am eager to explore francophone countries and the DOM TOM regions which seem more accessible to us now. I would like to take some time out of training to do some medical volunteering abroad and will hopefully put my French to good use. I will maintain my French by speaking with my friends and travelling to France and possibly even opting for further classes if this is feasible during the foundation programme.

## Practical Issues

I completed all my UPSAs and WBAs before coming to Lyon because I did not want to stress about doing this abroad, it is hard enough getting them to validate the form in the UK, nor did I fancy squeezing this in when I came back. I would advise other students to do the same as there are a lot of people who did have issues with this and had to plan this on their arrival to complete before or soon after their final review.

It is important to keep on top of your portfolio and this should not be difficult to do.

It is important to bring many ID photos, apply for the student EHIC card (seemingly identical to the standard EHIC), buy the SMERRA when you arrive, check your vaccinations and buy a kettle.

Most importantly profitez-bien! It is such an amazing experience and I am very grateful to have been a part of it.