

European Studies Report



Berlin 2015

Contents

Why I chose to do European Option.....	2
Before Your Departure.....	2
The week before	3
Arriving.....	4
Placements.....	5
Berlin	8
Leaving Berlin.....	9

Why I chose to do European Option

The European Option is an opportunity that you'd be foolish to pass up. The chance to study and spend time on something other than medicine, to get an additional qualification and then the chance for four months living in a great European city speaks for itself. It is definitely worth the few extra hours a week of work you have to put in and there's enough support if you need it. The placement abroad after finals is what sold the programme for me because it is such a great opportunity to really improve your language skills, to see how healthcare works in a different culture and to experience life somewhere quite different. I've always thought that it would also be a great foundation should I want to work in Germany or Switzerland in the future, but now that I've done it, it has made me appreciate the NHS and the training we receive and future prospects a lot more. During my placements I met many junior doctors who emphasised how lucky we were to have such a structured training programme and free healthcare and how envious they were of our foundation programme years. I still might work in Germany in the future but this experience has definitely made me much more appreciative of starting FY1 in just a few months time.

Before Your Departure

Placements - At some point you will get an e-mail saying it's time to pick placements (or you will have to e-mail asking about this). The form is official looking, the process is not. The only way to see what is on offer is to go through the old Erasmus reports to see what people recommend - there is no official list, that we saw, with all the options available. The quality of the placements is much more down to the hospital and department than the specialty, but I don't think you are able to specify which hospital you'd like to work at for each specialty. Fill in your chosen specialties, get it all stamped and signed and then wait – we got confirmation of our placements in November.

Accommodation – You want to arrange this as soon as possible because you do not want to be doing this while you're revising for finals – do it now! Look out for the e-mails from Berlin for flat swaps/flats to rent with other Erasmus students; we rented the flat of a medical student going to Preston on Erasmus and had it all sorted in October, which meant not having to think about it at all during finals revision. Otherwise www.wg-gesucht.de has loads

of people with rooms to rent for a few months at a time. Placements can be spread out all over the place so central (Mitte) is best for commuting.

Money – There is a pretty hefty payout before you even leave so save some pennies up. You'll be asked to transfer around €250 for "Semestergebühren"; this is your Semesterticket, which gives you travel on all forms of public transport in Berlin, and is worth the money. Don't use your bank for money transfers – the bank charges will quickly add up for paying deposits, rent, Semesterticket etc. www.transferwise.com is a useful website that gets rid of the transfer fees and will save you a lot of money in the long run. **Print out the confirmation of money transfer** - you need this for enrolment.

Language test – You may be asked to complete an additional language test "OLS Language assessment". The mark doesn't affect your going at all, it is set by the EU to monitor Erasmus placements – you do it before your placement and then again towards the end and they can see if your language has improved. It takes a bit of time and comes right in the middle of finals but it has to be done in order for you to receive your Erasmus funding.

Paperwork – There is a lot of paperwork involved in the whole process – you are dealing with the Erasmus department in Berlin, the Erasmus department in Manchester and the European Studies team and they all need copies of everything that everyone else is sending you. Most of this starts arriving around November/December time.

The week before

Bürgeramt Appointment – In Germany it is compulsory to register when you move into an area and you need to do this to complete Immatrikulation (enrolment). Make an appointment at the Bürgeramt (<http://service.berlin.de/standorte/buergeraemter/>) before getting there to avoid a long wait. You can make your appointment at any Amt in Berlin, it doesn't have to be your local one. You can turn up without an appointment but the waiting time can be anything from half an hour to over two.

Money Get some Euros out as you won't get any money loaded onto your cashpassport until you've completed enrolment and your certificate of arrival, so you'll need at least a week's worth of money.

Occupational Health Appointment – You'll get an e-mail telling you to make an appointment at occupational health, which needs to be done before you can start placements. For this you need your vaccination record and any paperwork you have from the Uni occupational health.

Packing – on the wards you either wear your own clothes with a Kittel (white coat) or scrubs. It is perfectly acceptable to wear jeans and t-shirts (respectable ones) underneath your Kittel so don't pack your back full of shirts and smart clothes. Arriving in February it is still the end of winter in Berlin and COLD! Bring your warmest coat, gloves, scarf, hat, boots, thermal underwear, hot water bottle... But by May it is definitely spring heading into summer so don't forget your shorts, sunglasses and bikini.

Arriving

Bürgeramt - To complete registration you'll need your passport and your tenancy agreement. You'll then be given a stamped piece of paper – do not lose it; you need it to complete Immatrikulation (see later) amongst other things. Take your Begrüßungsgeld form with you too to be stamped – this is a form from the Uni that you drop off at the Humboldt University and then go back about three weeks later to pick up €50 cash.

Immatrikulation (Enrollment) – this is not an easy process. You have to go to the Bundesministeriums für Bildung und Forschung (Kapelle-Ufer 1, Mitte) to sign all the forms and give the details of where you're living. You then have to take this paperwork, along with your confirmation of money transfer, to the International Students office (this place is constantly changing so look out for the address in their emails) in order to get your Semesterticket and to finish enrolment. If you've already registered at the Bürgeramt, take the confirmation with you to avoid having to go back again. No one will tell you how to get to these different places and do not expect any northern friendliness, this will be your first introduction to the German manner – do not take it personally!

Occupational Health – This is at the Charite Virchow Klinik, turn up at your appointment time, fill in the form on the table and take a seat – again do not expect much help from anyone and whatever you do, do not go into the registration office before you have been called. You'll have to show your vaccination record and they'll likely recommend some additional vaccinations. You can either arrange this there but you can also phone your local

Hausarzt and ask to have it done there – this should be free, just take along your European Health card. They'll also take some blood to give you a once over.

Certificate of Arrival – a certificate of arrival will have been e-mailed to you, just e-mail this to the International-Students team at the BMBF once you're enrolled, they'll e-mail it back, you e-mail it on to the Erasmus team, they put money onto your cashpassport.

Placements

The German system – It takes a little adjustment to get used to the German healthcare system and to find your place in it. Everyone will be a bit confused by you having finished your exams but still being a "Famulant". Many wards have "PJlers" – these are medical students doing their practical year before applying for jobs, they'll have passed some of their finals but still have some to do. Depending on how involved you want to get you can either liken yourself to them or try to reinforce that you are there voluntarily as a student. There might also be other Famulants – students in their third or fourth year doing a placement. The system is still very hierarchical but most of the consultants I met are perfectly friendly and happy to chat with you – just don't ever sit on the front row in any room.

A lot of the work of the doctors is the "Arztebrief" (discharge letter), this is a lot more detailed than the discharge letters of the NHS and quite time consuming. It is usually assumed that if you clerk a patient you write the discharge letter, which stopped me from clerking a lot of patients at the beginning, but just be up front about how you confident you are in your written German or clerk patients with another student and share the letter writing.

The placements are a great opportunity to exchange knowledge and experience because the systems are so different. There are no national guidelines for the management of different presentations and the training doctors receive is much less structured or uniform. The choices around management of patients is much more down to the individual doctor and you can learn a lot about making an assessment of the patients clinical condition and going with your "gut instinct". At the same time they're very responsive to learning about the structures and procedures that we're used to in England eg. Well's score, structures examinations etc. so take the opportunity to share knowledge too. Doctors pick their

specialty straight from medical school and only have four practical placements, so don't get the opportunity of gaining experience in lots of different specialties. The Assistenzärzte are similar to junior doctors but won't have had as much experience outside of their own specialty and often seem to be thrown in on the deep end, so it's great to help them out when you can but don't expect much teaching in return.

There are two companies that run hospitals in Berlin: Charité and Vivantes. The Charité are probably the better known ones and have the most number of medical students of any country in Europe. All hospitals are different but as a rule I found that the Charité hospitals generally see the more interesting cases but the staff are a bit more stressed and overworked and don't have much time to spend with medical students. The Vivantes hospitals tend to be a bit smaller, with fewer unusual presentations, but the staff tend to be a bit friendlier and integrate the medical students into the team more.

You have to get a certificate of attendance signed off for each placement – these can be downloaded from the Charité blackboard.

Neurology Charité Campus Mitte – this placement is not for the faint-hearted but if you have an interest in Neurology is absolutely essential. The hours are long – 8am until 7pm (although I did negotiate by the end of the first week to leave around 5) but you will see neurological conditions that you don't even see in textbooks. The team are all friendly but very overworked and it is always busy so expect your introduction to be a quick "hello" and you'll pick the rest up as you go along. The mornings start with taking bloods, then it's off to the Röntgenbesprechung where all the MRIs from the last 24 hours are looked at and explained by the radiologists. Then back to the ward for a quick ward round before clerking the new patients and discharging the old. Then it's presenting the new patients to the Consultant and another quick ward round, followed by some ward jobs. This is a great chance to practice your neuro examinations (and to learn a whole load of new ones) and to see every neuro sign under the sun. They also do 2-3 lumbar punctures per day and are perfectly happy to supervise you doing them too.

Obstetrics Charité Virchow Klinikum – The day starts at 8 with handover, then the students are expected to go round the antenatal and postnatal wards taking all the necessary bloods and putting in cannulas. After this you're free to join whichever team you'd like for the day.

There's the postnatal ward round and ward work, the antenatal ward round and work, the admissions unit, the delivery suite and the outpatient clinics. There's always plenty to see and the staff are all flexible so if nothing much is happening where you are you're free to go join another team. It's easy to see C sections and they're keen for you to get scrubbed in and assist. During my placement there were a lot of junior doctors who hadn't been in the team that long, which meant that I didn't get as much input or to do as much as we're used to because they were figuring things out themselves, so try to find a more senior doctor, who are much more willing to explain things and let you have a go, to spend some time with. I wouldn't necessarily recommend this placement because there was a lot of hanging around with very little input from the team, even though I was keen to get involved and help out, but I've heard from previous students that it was a great placement, so I think it depends very much on the team when you're there. The days usually finished between 2 and 4 and there's the opportunity to do late or night shifts too.

A&E Vivantes Auguste-Viktoria Klinikum- this was one of the best placements I've had throughout my training. The day starts around 8am and ends around 3-4pm but it will feel like you've been there about an hour. There's no hand over at the beginning of the day and no midday meetings to get through either. The team were very welcoming – the Chefarzt makes sure to take the medical students on a tour of the department and explain everything, and within a day I was seeing and managing my own patients. As a final year student with FY1 approaching this was a great placement to gain confidence in making independent decisions around patient care, with the right amount of support and supervision. A&E departments are run quite differently to the NHS because there's no emergency medicine specialty, so doctors rotate into A&E to cover their own specialty, meaning that the type of patients you see will be down to which specialty you are assigned to within A&E. As an example, the A&E at Auguste-Viktoria Klinikum was divided into Internal Medicine, Surgery, Neurology, Orthopaedics, Psychiatry, Urology and Gynaecology, whilst other hospitals have their surgical and medical A&Es completely separate.

Paediatrics Vivantes Neukölln – I probably gained the least from this placement but that's mostly because the team is well set up and runs efficiently so there's less scope for medical students to get involved. The day starts at 7:30 am with handover, then you go round with the doctor seeing all the patients, on Monday and Thursday there's then another ward

round with either the Oberarzt or Chefarzt, then it's doing the normal ward jobs and writing discharge letters until afternoon handover and Röntgenbesprechung at 2:30 pm. After this they like for the medical students to start the IV antibiotics running, after which you can leave around 3:30-4 pm. They weren't keen to have the medical students seeing patients by themselves so there's a lot of following the doctors around and sitting in the office watching them write letters. There is the chance to spend time in the Paediatric A&E, which starts at 8 am and offers the opportunity for you to get a bit more involved and see a few of your own patients. There's also a neonatology department and a paediatric intensive care, which you can ask to spend some time on too.

Berlin

This is a city like no other, which will welcome you no matter what because everyone is welcome in Berlin. Known for its non-stop night life and great clubs, there's a lot more to the atmosphere and lifestyle of Berlin that can't be described.

There are an unending number of things to see. I made a list at the start of the placement of all the things I wanted to see whilst there – it's three pages long so I'll just list some of the essentials:

1. The Kupell of the Reichstag - the glass dome on top of parliament building gives you a 360° view of Berlin, with the headset tour giving you information about all the sights. You need to book your visit in advance and sometimes the wait is two weeks but it is absolutely worth it.
2. The Wall memorial strip - based around Bernauerstrasse where a lot of the action happened this is a great place to spend an afternoon learning all about the history and politics and seeing visual demonstrations of how the wall strip actually looked, as well as some remaining bits of the wall.
3. The DDR Museum – for any DDR aficionados this is a must, and anyone with an interest in Berlin during the time of the wall should go too.
4. The flea markets – a bit of a Berlin institution, you'll find flea markets on most squares on Sundays. They're full of all things "cool" and often have a great selection of food on sale too. The Mauerpark one is probably the biggest and most famous

(check out the Mauerpark karaoke while you're there) but there's lots of smaller, more independent ones too.

5. Potsdam is a must visit too. 40 minutes from Mitte, the S-bahn travels straight there and it's included in the Semesterticket. It has the most number of extravagant palaces and parks crammed into one town, with lots of cafes and bars along the way, and is a great day away from the city.

During the placement there are also a few bank holidays, the most important of which for Berliners is May Day. This is a full of street parties and relaxed drinking in the park, descending into something edgier and seedier after dark, which perfectly captures the spirit of Berlin, so make sure you put it in your diary (and don't have your parents over that weekend).

Leaving Berlin

There's a few practicalities that need to be completed before leaving.

Ausmeldung – make another appointment at the Burgeramt to de-register from the area.

Report card – towards the end of the placement you'll get an e-mail from the International-Students office asking you to make an appointment so they can prepare your report card. You need to make the appointment for some time in your last placement and take hard copies of all the certificates of attendance you've had signed off for each placement.

Certificate of Attendance – you'll need to get a certificate of attendance signed off by the International-Students office no more than 7 days before the end of your placement. This will be e-mailed to you by the Erasmus office and allows you to get the final instalment of your Erasmus grant.