

European Option Report



**Berlin
2014**

Why I chose to do European Option

At Manchester Medical School we are very privileged to have the opportunity to also study a language along with our medical studies, a unique experience among medical schools in the UK. Having studied German at A-level this was something I was keen to pursue and was a determining factor in choosing Manchester as one of my medical schools. The idea of studying something not entirely related to medicine along side normal medical studies appealed to me a lot, and this has certainly been a really great aspect of the European Option. I found it refreshing to have something that took my mind off the daily slog of medicine and was a great opportunity to develop my German language skills further. Furthermore, the 4-month placement in Germany after finals was perhaps the biggest draw and I had my eyes set on going to Berlin for a long time. Thankfully, the three of us in our class all got our top choice of Berlin, probably due to the very small number of people in our class, and we were set to go right after finals, a very exciting prospect. And what a great 4 months it was – certainly made all those 2-hour German lessons on a dark, rainy Wednesday night after a long, arduous day in hospital worth it!

Arrival

Before you can revel in all the delights that Berlin has to offer, there is the minefield of German bureaucracy that has to be overcome first. An excruciatingly long and boring process that is oftentimes frustrating but ultimately character building and a good submersion into German cultural manners that will stand you in good stead throughout your time there.

We arrived a week before we were due to start our placements in order to sort everything out (this is also strongly recommended by the ERASMUS office at Charité). This does mean leaving shortly after Finals are done and dusted and before you receive your results, a prospect I was not overly enthused at, as I had hoped I would be in Manchester for results, just in case something went seriously wrong! But it is definitely advisable to get there as soon as possible to sort everything out, so you can start placements stress-free. We were then also in Berlin when we got the results that we passed, which was *supergeil*!

Flights

If you're planning on flying from Manchester, cheapest flights are with Easyjet from Liverpool, which is really easy to reach from Manchester city centre with a Terravision bus (50 min). Flying from London is cheaper still!

Accommodation

Although the prospect of searching for accommodation before you go whilst you are probably the most stressed you've ever been is not a joyous one, if you can take a bit of time to plan your accommodation pre-arrival, do, because it will make life infinitely easier when you get there. You will also need an address for the ERASMUS coordinator to send you your student IDs.

I planned to share a flat with one of the girls in my German class and our plan was to find somewhere on <http://www.airbnb.co.uk> for a week or so and then find somewhere more permanent when we got there. Out of luck, the man we were subletting from didn't need the flat for 4 months, so we ended up renting off him for the whole time we were there, at a slightly reduced price (€375,00/month). This is probably the upper end of rental prices in that area; a lot of locals said we were probably paying too much, especially considering I was sleeping in the living room, a common occurrence in flats in Berlin, but it suited us well and we had a lovely flat.

Rental prices are on the increase in Berlin due to the exponential rate of gentrification there, so don't be surprised if they are a bit pricier than you'd expected; you'll still be able to find a good place in a great location for a price unimaginable in London/Manchester.

The flat we found was in the up-and-coming district of **Neukölln**, a neighbouring *Bezirk* (Berlin word for 'district') to the more infamous Kreuzberg. This was a great neighbourhood to live in and I would strongly recommend it – large Turkish community (therefore amazing Turkish food), lots of nameless trendy bars and cafes, cheaper than Kreuzberg and great transport connections. Our flat was by U + S-Bahnhof Hermannstraße, on the Ring Bahn and U8 line, so was extremely easy to get anywhere.

Friedrichshain and **Kreuzberg** are also great areas to live with lots going on. If you feel like splashing the cash, head to **Prenzlauer Berg**, really lovely area and my favourite in Berlin.

Our friend opted to live with German people and found her accommodation when she got there – searching WG websites and going to view flats while staying at a friend's. She found one very quickly and was also living really near us in Neukölln (Check her report for more info). Finding a place to live is really easy even if you haven't sorted it before, so don't stress if you haven't! Bear in mind also that Berlin is very multicultural, so a lot of the WGs will also be occupied by other non-German expats like yourselves.

Anmeldung

Once you've found yourself a humble/not so humble Berlin abode, you need to get yourself registered at the local *Bürgeramt* (town hall) – this is necessary to register at the university. In Neukölln, this was really close by at Rathaus Neukölln. You can use this website to find your nearest one: <https://service.berlin.de/standorte/buergeraemter/>.

You will need your **passport**, your **address**, the **address of the landlord** and a **book** (you might be waiting a while – we waited max half an hour but up to 2 hours in Prenzlauer Berg apparently). If you're subletting (*Untermieter*), make sure you get the address of the actual landlord, not the subletter, because they won't accept it and you'll have to make two journeys, as we found out the hard way. You'll get a bit of paper with a stamp on it confirming your residence – don't lose it!

Immatrikulation

This is the fancy term for registering at the university, as well as a mouthful to say auf Deutsch and took me several weeks to master. **Angelika Cernitori** and **Nikola Lepom** are the two ERASMUS coordinators at Charité and are your go to people for any problems. You will find them at Campus Mitte – the directions should be in a Welcome Pack, which will get emailed to you. They are, however, only contactable in person on a Tuesday 09:30-12:30 h and 13:30-16:00 h and Thursday 09:30-12:30 h, so bear this in mind before you go because they won't be there otherwise.

You will need to bring: your **passport**, your **EHIC** (European Health Insurance Card), your **Anmeldung certificate** (if you haven't had a chance to *anmelden* yet, you can still register but you will need to bring back proof to them within a month or so) and **proof of payment of tuition fees**.

Before you arrive in Berlin, you will have had to email copies of all this stuff to them but they will appear to have had no recollection or record of this so make sure you bring it all with you! Tuition fees are €240 and you can now pay online before you go. This might seem like a lot but includes travel on all forms of transport for your whole time there, so is well worth it. Once all that is sorted, your student ID will be sent to you in the post. You'll be given a temporary one that also gives you travel while you wait for the real ID.

The one remaining thing to do is a visit to the *Betriebsarzt* (**Occupational health**) – you should receive an appointment for this before you arrive. You need this to allow you to work on the wards. Remember to bring: **health questionnaire**, which will be sent to you before arrival, **vaccination records**, **envelope with your address on it** and **stamp** – for some reason they feel the need to send you your blood results, was good to know my LFTs were doing fine I guess. Don't be disheartened by a

disgruntled, ill mannered, seemingly misanthropic occupational health doctor, this is just his way and also our first lesson in how some Germans may initially greet you. It was clear we were no longer in the north of England, where everyone is greeted with the name 'love' or 'petal'; here the greetings were less endearing.

Once all that madness is out of the way, you will be an independent Berlin citizen, ready to explore this great city and get working on the wards. At the end of the report I've given some general tips regarding phone, bank accounts, living costs, etc.

Hospital Life

With regards to placements, before you arrive, you will be asked to provide 4 specialties you would like to do and the ERASMUS coordinators will sort these out for you as best as they can. Bear in mind, certain specialties are extremely popular, such as Paediatrics, so if you are interested in doing a particular specialty, it may be worth organising this yourself early on and informing the ERASMUS coordinators that you've confirmed this.

Charité is one of the largest clinics in Europe and in our time there it had just recently celebrated its 300th birthday. It has a fascinating history, which you can find out more about at the **Berliner Medizinhistorisches Museum** on the Mitte campus (free for medical students) and has lots of other interesting collections, so is well worth a visit. There are three main campuses at Charité: Mitte, Virchow and Benjamin Franklin, and you could be placed at any of them, as well as potentially some hospitals affiliated with Charité elsewhere. **Mitte** campus is located in the very centre of town right by Bundestag, Hauptbahnhof and Friedrichstraße, so is a fantastic location to work and is dominated by a huge tower with the name 'Charité' emblazoning its top, which can be seen all over the city. Furthermore it is attached to the campus of Humboldt University, the university with which Charité is connected and whose main building on Unter der Linden is truly grand. **Virchow** is further north near Wedding (pronounced Vedding of course, takes a bit of getting used to!), and is a really beautiful campus and where I spent most of my time. **Benjamin Franklin** is quite far south in the area of Steglitz and not quite as easy to reach as the others.

On the wards, you will be expected to wear a **white coat** (*Kittel*). When you arrive on the ward they can usually print you off a form that you take to the laundry service where you will be able to collect your coat. Alternatively, contact the secretary before you arrive and arrange to meet them on your first day to get this form as well as a name badge. The white coat is great and allows you to carry everything on you very easily. You can wear what you want underneath (within reason). I normally just wore jeans and tshirt. Some doctors will wear scrubs or white trousers underneath and have their own trainers for the ward, but you don't have to do this. You will also notice rules on jewellery and nail polish are far more relaxed in Germany than in the UK. One nurse on the paediatric ward took to wearing opened-toed heeled sandals with painted nails and rolled up scrubs, as well as a full set of make-up and jewellery. So if you like the idea of going to hospital looking glam, feel free!

The hierarchy here is far more prominent. Doctors start as an **Assistenzarzt** after medical school, then after 5 years of training in a chosen specialty become a **Facharzt**. Then an indeterminate amount of time depending on how determined the doctor is, they can become an **Oberarzt**. This is sort of equivalent to a consultant but they are on the wards on a daily basis, so in that respect are more like registrars. When one is a Facharzt, you are also able to leave hospital and set up your own *Praxis*. This is extremely common in Germany, especially in specialties such as Paeds, Gynae and Derm. The top doctor is a **Chefarzt** and they are in charge of a whole department and will usually do ward round once a week, if that. They tend to command a lot of respect so be sure to use 'Sie' with them (as you should with most members of staff really to start with, especially the ward sister!) and they also are responsible for treating private patients.

You'll become aware very quickly that **private healthcare** plays a much bigger role in Germany. Often wards will have rooms specifically for private patients, or if not, space will be made to ensure they are given their own room. I also found that as a medical student you were sometimes not allowed to clerk/do procedures on private patients, or only cannulate if 'you're absolutely sure of getting it'.

Make of it what you will; it was very interesting to see the difference and where we may well be heading in the UK. Furthermore, due to the infamous nature of Charité, there are a lot of extremely wealthy patients from abroad, particularly Russia and the Middle East, who come specifically to Germany to be treated at the Charité. Again, this was another interesting difference, and one that often caused a lot of issues on the ward, especially with regards to the language barriers that arose and the communication of treatment information.

Your time there will be mostly during the *Winterferien* (Feb-Apr) and this is when medical students there have to do one of their 4 *Famulatus* (equivalent to SSC), so often on placements there will be other medical students or *Famulants*. This is the title you will be given but implies you have less ability than you actually do, so be sure to mention that you are essentially a **PJ – Praktisches Jahr** student. This is their 6th year of study and is roughly equivalent to our F1; the stuff they do is more appropriate for our level. One of the really nice things about medical students on placement there is they are always integrated into the team really well, so there's less of a feeling of sitting in the corner and doing nothing!

Working hours vary placement to placement, but on the whole, you will usually need to be in for 08.00 and will usually finish around 16.00, depending how much there is to do on the wards, sometimes earlier, sometimes later. Paeds I was usually done by 14.00, Derm I was usually done 16.30-17.00. **Lunch** is usually around 13.00 and doctors and medical students often eat together at the **Mensa**, which is the relatively cheap and variably good hospital canteen. Great salad bar!

Also, it is worth trying to get **SAP access**. This is the computer system that is used across the whole of Charité and allows you to access patient letters, order bloods and write discharge letters. Ask a secretary of one of your placements to get a form for you – this usually takes a while to sort but is worth getting, as you can be a lot more useful on the ward. You will need a Charité email address for this (see below).

➤ **Pädiatrie – Pneumologie und Immunologie**
Station 15, Campus Virchow-Klinikum

My first placement was on Paediatrics, which I was really happy to get, as it is a specialty I am very interested in. The ward I was on was a respiratory ward, which specialised in Cystic Fibrosis (Mukoviszidose), as well as Immunology. Interestingly, adult CF patients were also treated on this ward, which I found particularly strange, so there was a mix of child and adult medicine. This was a really great placement to start on and the staff were all really lovely, as you might expect on a paediatric ward! I was invited on a night out by some of the younger doctors and also invited to dinner at the Oberärztin's flat with some of the other doctors – this involved me sitting there for the whole evening saying nothing and trying to work out when it was appropriate to laugh! My German at this point was not particularly great after a half-year gap of not speaking it, so I took more of an observatory role for the first couple of weeks. After I developed my linguistic skills a little further, I began clerking patients myself, as well as doing more practical skills, such as cannulating and taking blood from babies and children; this was a great experience as had not been given the opportunity to do this in England. The majority of patients were children coming in for allergy testing, or *Provokation*, to assess their level of allergies to different foodstuffs. I found this quite a strange concept, as it seemed to be a very standard thing here, which it doesn't seem to be in England.

➤ **Dermatologie**
Station 46b, Campus Benjamin Franklin

I chose dermatology because I thought it would be a useful placement, as it is something that is not covered heavily in the Manchester curriculum and thought I could get something useful out of it. It was interesting to find out that dermatology was a very big deal in Germany (this was one of 4 wards, the other 3 on the Mitte campus), as well as being one of the most competitive specialties in Germany. Staff members on the ward were on the whole very nice. The Oberarzt seemed very happy to have an English-speaking student on the ward, which I subsequently found out was because he wanted me to 'review' a few translations of English he had done for a presentation. This subsequently

turned out to mean he wanted me to translate a 50-slide presentation for him into English, which he put on a USB and asked me to do at home. This put me in a bit of difficult position, as I didn't really feel I could say no and had already agreed to look over his translations. I didn't feel particularly happy being used like that and other than a brief thank you, I didn't receive much gratitude or recognition for the effort I'd put in. Other than this incident, I got a lot out of this placement. There were lots of bloods and cannulas to do on the ward (this is the sole remit of medical students in Germany), so I got a lot of practice there. I also got the opportunity to do punch biopsies on my own which were a great experience, as well as seeing a wide range of dermatological pathologies. On the whole though this was a good placement but do beware of cheeky consultants who might want to take advantage of your native English ability. Most doctors realize you're there to learn German, even if they're a bit confused as to why, so we were always spoken to in German. If you're not, just kindly say that you'd like to speak German or just passively aggressively always respond in German, they usually cave eventually.

➤ **Innere Medizin – Gastroenterologie/Hepatologie**
Station 49, Campus Virchow-Klinikum

I ended up spending 8 weeks on this ward, because after Dermatology it felt like a dream. I also find Gastro very interesting and I enjoyed working on the ward. There was plenty of opportunity to do lots of cannulas and bloods; there were often upwards of 10 every morning, so after a while it did become quite tedious and didn't always feel like I was learning but doing the menial jobs the doctors didn't have time for. This is a common occurrence across all specialties. Be sure to say that you are also there to learn! I was also able to clerk patients and present on ward round, a less daunting prospect at this point now that my German had developed a lot the last few months. There is also the opportunity to do ascitic taps as well, something they are happy to let medical students do.

Berlin

Berlin is an absolutely amazing city, and I definitely fell in love with it. With Germany's such recent tumultuous history, Berlin certainly bears the brunt of its scars, which it displays openly and vividly, culminating in a city with an incredible mix of buildings and districts, people and places, each with their own unique charm and character, be it the rougher, industrial ex-East Berlin district of Friedrichshain, with its great clubs, bars and restaurants to the more beautiful and gentrified balcony-cladded district of Prenzlauer Berg.

It's also a relatively cheap city so living costs are quite low which is nice! Shopping for **food** is cheap and good quality. Eating out is relatively cheap as well and you can get some really nice, good quality meals for a good price! Berlin also loves a good pastry, so there are bakeries left, right and centre that always look and smell amazing, and are perfect for a quick breakfast. The pastry stands on the U-bahn also have coffee for €1 which is always nice on the way to work in a rush. Also you are never more than a few metres away from a seemingly nameless trendy bar/café with an eclectic mix of vintage furniture, a name sign you can only see next to the door and usually run by a man with a beard. Also, the magic of the *Späti* (short for *Spätkauf*) is one thing Germany is famous for. These are off-licenses that are usually run by Turkish people and are open come rain or shine, where you can buy a bottle of beer (*Berliner Kindl* is the local tippie of choice) for a measly €0,90 and drink at the tables provided outside (weather permitting of course). This was a very useful activity to while away the time when waiting for your clothes to get washed at the launderette.

If Berlin is famous for one thing (other than the wall), it's the **nightlife**. With techno music taking a stronghold here in the post-wall era of the early 90s, over the years Berlin has become a mecca for techno and house music lovers all over the world. Clubs open to the wee hours of the following Sunday evening or even Monday are numerous. They don't tend to open until midnight and most people don't get there until about three in the morning; they then stay open until at least midday the next day. Door policies for some of the bigger clubs (Berghain and Watergate in particular) can be

quite strict, but going alone or in a pair, not being too dressy and speaking German usually help but don't be offended if you do get turned away, can always try again if you don't feel too disheartened.

Berlin is in a great position to go and explore other parts of Germany. The one trip I made out of Berlin while I was there was to **Hamburg**, which is a three-hour coach ride away and is a fantastic city that's well worth a visit. **Dresden** is also close by and is another really cool city.

<http://meinfernbus.de/> is a really great website for booking cheap buses to places. You've also got **Poland** just across the border, which we didn't have time to explore but would be well worth a visit – not often you can just pop to Poland for the day.

I could write endlessly about where to go and what to see but will just give you a few highlights below. Check out <https://www.couchsurfing.org/> as well, they have all sorts of events that people set up. We all joined a yoga class this way and made lots of friends there which was really great.

From Hanoi With Love – Great and cheap vietnamese restaurant round the corner from us in Neukölln. Hermanstr. (U-Bhf Leinestr. – U8)

Santa Maria – Cheap and fun mexican diner in Kreuzberg, on buzzing Oranienstr, Kottbusser Tor (or Kotti to the locals) (U-Bhf Kottbusser Tor – U1 and U8)

Prater – Berlin's oldest beer garden in heart of Prenzlauer Berg. Kastanienallee. (U-Bhf Eberswalderstr. – U2)

Stadtbad – Great club in old converted swimming pool. Room upstairs is the old pool and downstairs is the boiler room. Very atmospheric. Not strict door policy. Gerichtstr. (U + S-Bhf Wedding – Ring and U6)

Sisyphos – Amazing club with loads of cool stuff outside, feels like a festival and great when weather's nice. Bit hard to reach but worth it. (Tram 21 from S-Bhf Rummelsberg – S3)

Revaler Straße – Street with old abandoned warehouse buildings that have been converted into galleries, bars, clubs, climbing wall and skate park. Great when weather's hot. (U + S-Bhf Warschauer Straße)

Cafe am Neuen See – Beautiful cafe/beer garden in middle of Tiergarten right next to a lake in the heart of the city but feel like you could be in the middle of the countryside. Need to walk a bit to find it but well worth it! Great stone-baked pizzas and cake. Lichtensteinallee. (U + S- Bhf Zoologischer Garten)

Stasi Museum – The old headquarters of the Stasi, the East German secret police, now turned into a fascinating museum that details the history of the DDR and the inner workings of the Stasi. Far better than the DDR museum for an insight into life in East Berlin. The building is in *The Lives of Others*, a great film about that era. If you haven't seen it, watch it before you go.

Berlin is full of **abandoned buildings** which are really fun to check out, such as the old **Iraqi embassy** to the DDR, with documents still lying around, **Beelitzer Krankenhaus**, a little bit out of Berlin in Beelitz (also famous for its *Spargel*) – an old beautiful hospital left abandoned, and **Teufelsberg**, an old Soviet spy post over in Grunewald in the west of the city with great views over Berlin. **Tempelhof Airport** in Neukölln closed in 2008 and is now used as a park – very impressive place and can walk along the old runways.

General Tips

- **Bank account** – you can do this very easily once you've done your Anmeldung. Most banks need you to make an appointment to open an account. This was useful for paying rent and generally ease of getting out cash as and when you want. Bear in mind, if you use the ATM of a bank that you're not with or is not part of the same group of banks (Berliner/Commerz/Deutsche are one group, for example) there is a €4,99 charge. Sparkasse is probably the most common bank around.
- **Phone** – I changed my contract to allow me to use it in Germany. In hindsight it would probably have been useful to have a German number but I survived anyway.
- **Pfand** – This is the deposit system everyone pays on certain bottled items to promote recycling. So, remember to not throw away your beer/soft drink bottles (doesn't apply to wine or spirit bottles) and cans and take them back to the supermarket as they all have a deposit on them that you can get back. If you manage to accumulate quite a lot, as we often did, you can make back a fair few euros (...which you can just put towards more beer).
- **Charité email account** – noone told us about this but you do automatically get a Charité email address. As soon as you've registered and got your student ID, go to <https://zugang.charite.de/> and follow the instructions to set it up. You can then access your email at <https://email.charite.de/>. You will need access to this if you want to get your login details for SAP – the software used on the wards to do everything.
- **Library** – there's a great library at the Campus Virchow, I assume also at Mitte but I was never there. It's pretty simple to set up an account, just take your Anmeldung certificate with you! They couldn't find me on the system initially and the woman nearly had a melt down and didn't really know what to do. To see a well-stocked library was also quite a change. Useful for getting books for certain placements. There are equivalents to the Oxford Handbook, which is *Checkpoint Innere Medizin* and its of a similar size, you'll see them being used everywhere if you do Innere Medizin. Useful for terminology and general info. I also found a *Klinische Anamnese und Untersuchung* book really useful. There are loads so just pick the one you find most useful.
- **Language classes** – I personally didn't take any language classes while I was there, but I feel it may have helped to develop my German a bit further than it did perhaps. I still felt my linguistic ability improved vastly over my time there irrespective, and as long as you are motivated to keep looking up words and reviewing grammar you can get by, but certainly a language course would help more.
- **Dictionary** – Most useful thing I had in Berlin was probably the *dict.cc* app I downloaded onto my phone. It allows you to download the English-German dictionary onto it so you can use it offline. It also has quite a lot of medical terminology in it, so I found it invaluable on the ward, as well as doing day-to-day stuff. You can also store words you find difficult to remember, as I often found I was looking up the same words over and over, so is a good way to review vocab.
- **Begrüßungsgeld** – This is €50 that is given to everyone who arrives in Berlin. We got an email about it half way through our time there. You can ask for it while you immatriculate though as well if you're short of cash!
- **UPSAs/UCEXs/UCMDs/ESA** – sadly, these all still have to be done in Germany. I would advise getting as many UPSAs done before Finals as possible. You will have 2 UCEXs and 1 UCMD to do while you are there but this is pretty easy to do as all the doctors speak excellent English. Just make sure you get them to open their email while you are there and make sure they click the submit button, otherwise it might never get done!

- **Leaving admin** – you will leave Berlin precisely how you arrived – in a whirl of forms and unhelpful administrative staff. There are certificates you need signing off for each placement from the ERASMUS department. We were only told about these on our second placement, which was incredibly helpful. They need to be signed AND stamped on each placement. You don't get your certificate of attendance or transcript of study if you don't have all 4 – these you need to get the rest of your ERASMUS grant. You will have to go to Angelika's office in your last week to get this all sorted. Don't go at 12.15 on a Thursday before you're about to leave, unless you want your head bitten off, and make sure you have copies of all your certificates, so try and get it all done in good time!