

European Option year 5 placement Student Report (2014)

Madrid-Hospital Universitario de la Paz (Autonoma).

Why I chose to study on the European Studies programme

I chose to study on the ES programme for my love of languages. I have been intrigued and interested in foreign languages and cultures since I was a child. I also thought it was a good opportunity for me to take part in activities outside of medicine, and to meet new people, and I also knew it would be enjoyable. This was confirmed when I first started the classes at the university. I had a great relationship with both Spanish teachers and with my fellow classmates. On the down side, we had to sit a few more language exams, which can be slightly annoying especially when revising for the medical exams. My level was initially good so it didn't warrant me to revise too much for the exams. The standard required is very achievable. We formed a good group of friends in our Spanish class and it is nice to be in a smaller group at least once a week rather than the very large lectures with the rest of the year.

I also thought it was the perfect opportunity to continue studying a language I had learnt in school. The ES programme had influenced me in my choice in applying to the University of Manchester in the first place. It also gave me the opportunity to do an SSC placement in year 4 in Madrid and already get a feel of the city before I came here in Year 5. I definitely felt that an SSC was too short a time to spend here as it was only 4 weeks long. However, in year 5 I really got the chance to immerse myself in the local culture, meet new friends, and learn about the medical system here. This placement was during blocks 5, 6, 7 and 8, which is much longer than the usual elective placements. This is another advantage of the ES programme, which makes up for the fact that it restricts you to stay in a European country. The University of Manchester is one of the few Universities, to my knowledge, to offer such a programme in the UK. While medical Erasmus programmes are very common throughout Europe they still remain very underdeveloped in the UK, mainly due to a greater focus on electives to more exotic destinations (South America, Australia, South Africa). An Erasmus is in many ways a unique and once in a lifetime experience. Very few students forget their Erasmus placements, even as they grow older, and start working, it is often at the forefront of their student memories. I wanted to experience this, as I had many friends from abroad who had done similar placements all around Europe and their stories appealed to me.

An overview of your experience of living and working in the placement hospital and its surrounding area.

Given the choice between Granada and Madrid, I had decided to go for Madrid. I had already visited both cities and already had friends in both cities, but I picked Madrid purely on the basis that it was a larger city. I enjoy more the atmosphere of larger cities, even though Madrid does have its downsides compared to Granada, namely cost of life.

I decided to live in the city centre, as I knew it would cater more to my needs. I enjoy the shopping, restaurant and bars lifestyle of living in the city centre. Unfortunately, it is also more expensive than living in the outskirts. I was fortunate to live with a nice group of young people that I got on well with. One of the flat mates was a bit older and did not agree with some of the music we were playing on the weekends, which caused some friction, but besides that my living experience in that flat was great. We did many activities together, and had meals together, as well as went out on the weekends. I was looking forward to meeting new people in a different city, after having lived many years in Manchester. Highlights of my trip included attending numerous football matches of the two main city clubs, as well as spending Sundays in La Latina, and going for walks in the Retiro. I quickly accommodated myself to my new lifestyle here. I did not see it as an “elective”/holiday but immersed myself in the working life of the city. There are many good restaurants in Madrid with a large range of quality and prices. However cheaper tapas bars are also numerous and one can have a beer and food in a friendly atmosphere even on a weekday.

Working in the hospital was fairly relaxed, and in some ways similar to what it's like in the UK, although they are less patient focused. I spent most of my time between the wards, consultations, theatre, and attending the department meetings. I greatly enjoyed this, and they were usually open to questions, although some did seem to get a bit irritated at the fact a student was asking questions. There are helpful and unhelpful doctors in every department and the first week was often necessary to get an idea of this. My days would usually consist in starting at hospital at 8am or 9am and then shadowing the “residentes” who are the equivalent to junior registrars. In Spain, and like in many other countries, the system is different in that there are no foundation years so graduates start their training post as soon as they finish. There are pros and cons to both systems. Some countries, like in South America, have a one year compulsory foundation period after graduation and maybe this is the best option, as it allows you to gain experience but also makes you start specialty training earlier.

The weather makes a great difference too. In Madrid the weather is cold in the winter but it rains a lot less than in England. In March and April it is equivalent to the British summer, and in May it is very hot. I didn't feel like leaving at the end, but unfortunately all good things have come to an end, especially as I had to come back to do the National Prescribing Assessment Exam. The thought of going back in June crossed my mind more than once. If it wasn't for the pressure of getting my driving license I probably would have, but as present my plans are to remain in the UK in June for that purpose. I lived in the neighbourhood of Malasana, which is famous for its bars, shops, and vintage atmosphere. I would often spend some time strolling in the streets of this neighbourhood. It is also only a walk away from Gran Vía, and Sol where more shopping can be done. I also arranged for my flat to be close to the metro, where I could take a direct line to my hospital, which was roughly a 25-minute journey.

Being in Madrid also allowed me to be closer to some of my family that lives in the South of Spain. I went there on three weekends with the AVE high velocity train. I don't get the chance to see them too often so seeing them three times in four months was invaluable, especially as my grandparents are not very well.

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 had already done an SSC in Spain in year 4 so I was already aware of the major differences in hospital. Moreover, I had also spent a lot of time throughout my life in hospitals in Spain, accompanying my grandparents that live there full time. The hospitals are globally very similar. Indeed, throughout the developed world I find that hospitals are more or less the same, with the most striking differences noticed only in poorer countries. In Manchester, the wards are organised with a greater number of patients in each “bay” or room. It is not uncommon to see 8 or 10 patients in the same room/bay; single rooms are reserved for patients with special needs or with highly contagious diseases. There are only single or double rooms at the La Paz hospital in Madrid, each with a TV. This makes for a better patient experience. Also there are no special visiting times, so designed family members and friends can stay with their loved ones as much as they please.

The medical programme is very different to the way it is run in the UK, and more specifically in Manchester. Indeed, their system is in many ways the opposite. Manchester is very focused on self-directed learning, which gives you a lot of freedom as to your own learning. However, it basically means it is up to you to teach yourself medicine on your own. We get given the learning objectives of the cases at the end of the group sessions, but it still means we have to go home and learn it ourselves. Moreover, I felt throughout my medical degree more than half the time is often wasted trying to look for the information rather than learning it. Indeed, I found myself using a large number of different books trying to find the “best explanations”. In Spain they get given notes to learn, and have classes on a daily basis teaching them various modules. They are then examined on those various modules individually every few months, for example, dermatology, or nephrology. I find this system better as it makes it easier for the students to learn and makes sure they have more in depth knowledge. The notes will have been edited by professors and teachers with experience in teaching students, which makes it easier to learn. In Manchester, we never get tested on topics separately or individually like they do in Spain. I found the students to be more studious in general than in Manchester, with a stronger emphasis on book reading. This had a positive influence on me, as it reminded me I had some revision to do before I start work as a foundation doctor. Indeed I found their knowledge to be very good, and noticed I needed to go over through a lot of my theory.

On the clinical side however, the students are lacking in skills. This is also partly due to the fact that medical students and doctors here don’t do the “tasks” that are reserved for nurses. Indeed, while UK medical students spend time practicing taking blood, catheters, setting up infusions etc. these jobs are reserved for nursing student and nurses in Spain. In fact I was mistaken a few times for a nursing student because I asked to do several tasks to complete my UPSAs and they were surprised and found it very odd, even more so when I told them they had to complete a form assessing how well I did it. They did not see it as a doctor’s role to do these things, and certainly not for a medical

student. I myself was confused when I first joined the medical as to why there was such a great emphasis on developing these skills then I realised that foundation doctors often get given “tasks” of difficult bloods or catheters to do. I’m still not sure why this role is not fully reserved for nurses as it is in Spain, and other countries in Europe.

Furthermore, patient examinations are very seldom practiced here, partly due to the fact all their exams are written and they never get tested on them. It is very out of the ordinary for a student to ask to do an examination on a patient. Also, when the doctors examine patients they very rarely wash their hands both before and after. Furthermore hygiene policies such as no watches, and clean clothes are not respected as jewellery and watches are often worn and they wear their white medical coat on a daily basis, which is not washed very often. This coat is constantly in contact with patients and hospital staff. Furthermore they go outside with it to smoke or eat in the cafeteria. There is a large emphasis on theory in Spain, whilst in the UK they are more based on reasoning. I think the perfect balance would be a mixture of the two. A simplistic way of illustrating this would be, for example, asking the question how many fingers does the patient have? While a Spanish student might say “10” a Manchester graduate might say “it depends on how many amputations he has had” and then look at the patients hands.

Overall I would say medical education is poorly developed in Spain. They have little experience of dealing with students, partly due to the fact students spend little time in hospital and much more time in the library, at the faculty attending classes. Some were even surprised that I was keen to stay till 3 or later than 3 (with no lunch break) after having arrived at 8. Indeed those are the “doctor” hours and local students rarely spend that much time in hospital. However, increased time in the faculty does mean they generally have superior knowledge.

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.

Linguistically I feel I have overall improved my Spanish, which I’m happy about. I think the improvement was subtle though, as my level was already very good. I think the area in which I have improved the most is listening. The Spanish accent involves a much more rapid speech, than that of South American countries. Overall I prefer the South American accents as they are softer, slowly, and have more melodies than the Spanish. I remember often being tested on listening as a student in our language classes in Samuel Alexander. I thought this was good preparation for this Erasmus Placement. However, the tapes were often of bad quality and in person it is always easier as one can lip-read. Also, I noticed the eagerness of people in Madrid to practice their English with me once they found out I was living in England; this was fine and I was happy to speak to them in English. In the future I would like to make more trips to Spanish speaking countries to continue to speak the language as much as I can. I also feel like I would like to continue doing Spanish classes in some form when I’m back in Manchester. I’m aware of the Instituto Cervantes and the classes they offer and maybe I will look more into this in the future.

In terms of intercultural understanding I think I have gained the most from a medical viewpoint. I understood in greater detail how the medical system works and is viewed here. I had already done an SSC in Spain so I already had a broad understanding of this. However, with the longer time period this time I was able to become friends with many healthcare professionals within the hospital. With regards to the culture, I was already very familiar with the Spanish culture and way of life. I had already visited almost every Spanish city when I was younger with either friends or family. Furthermore, I have many Spanish friends both within Spain and outside of Spain. Although British people have a poor reputation abroad, mainly due to the mass holidayers, the Spanish people were in general very keen on getting to know about what Manchester was like, as they had often already travelled to London. They are always motivated to go out and have fun outdoors, which I was pleased about. A lot of the culture evolves around living life outdoors, going to restaurants, and then bars, and just walking around the streets. This characteristic is not really shared by other cultures with similar climates, such as in Italy, which makes Spain in many ways unique. In general, life is slower paced here than in London, for example. An 8 o'clock start here, often means 8:15. Another example would be the use of escalators in the metro. The large majority seem to be content to be stood still on it instead of climbing up it, even if it means 5-10 extra minutes to leave the metro. In fact they rarely notice that other people would like to go faster and they block the passage. Buses throughout the country are also often late.

This placement has, however, confirmed to me that I would like to work here one day. I enjoy the climate, as well as the working hours. Finishing at 3 o'clock means you can enjoy life fully afterwards, especially when you don't have homework. Madrid is a big city with lots of different neighbourhoods, and there is always something to do. As of now, working here in the future is just an idea and I haven't made any concrete plans to do so. I still wish to do my foundation training in the UK, as I feel it will be beneficial for me and that I will learn a lot. But further down the line, I will look out for any opportunities to come to Spain, not even necessarily Madrid; I like a lot of the Spanish cities. This placement also convinced me that my Spanish level was good enough to work in a Spanish speaking country, thus also in South America. I have already travelled to Peru and Bolivia, and those were perhaps some of my best trips. Again I hope that one day I will be able to work there, perhaps as part of an NGO for an extended period of time. I'm not certain yet at which point in my training it would be best to go but it has always been one of my objectives. I feel with the languages I speak this can become a reality and I will be able to make a bigger impact.

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

The administration part of the faculty is sometimes a little difficult to deal with. The information about my Erasmus was not very clear. I was given instructions to meet someone called "Javier" in Docencia after registering as a student at the faculty for him to organise my placements. He was almost never in his office and his working hours were very short. The other staff in Docencia were not sure what to do with me. It was as if I was the first Erasmus student to arrive, which was definitely not the case. I was told they would organise things for me, but nothing happened, so I decided to take things into my

own hands. I just went into the various departments I had picked on the faculty registration sheet and asked them if I could do placements there and gave them my own dates. They were surprised they hadn't been told beforehand but then I explained the situation and they were happy to have me. I wasn't told anything about faculty classes, nor language classes. I guess it depends which hospital people are in. But in a similar case to mine, just go ask department secretaries if you can do a short placement there, and they should normally be ok with it, especially if you're able to let them know in advance.

Besides this, I was also confused as to which forms I needed to get signed. I decided to get the ones I needed for the University of Manchester (Medlea ones) and that's it. In other hospitals of the Autonoma, I know other Manchester students got given placement sheets to sign for the Autonoma as well, but as my placement wasn't well organised I didn't. However, it is important to get your transcript of study at the end, at the main campus of the international office, before going back to the UK. I know this because I went to ask the faculty about this. The University of Manchester also require a transcript of study, as well as a certificate of attendance for the whole placement that they provide.

We also normally get given a bursary of 250 euros to use for Spanish classes for certain courses if you double check with the International Programmes officer (Melanie O'Brien) if you are entitled to a reimbursement. I sent an email about specific classes I was interested in but got an automated response saying she was receiving too many emails and might delay in replying. I never received a reply. My advice would be to sort this out before going abroad when still in Manchester to make it easier to organise and make sure you get a refund. I was scared to pay for the classes to then be told I wasn't reimbursed. Overall I don't have a major regret that I didn't do any classes but I feel it should have been better explained which courses we were entitled to do without having to constantly email about it. It would be much simpler that way.

Any addresses, phone numbers and contacts that might be useful for future students.

Apartment estate agency Madrid:

C/San Bernardo 126, 3^aD 28015 Madrid tel: 915553030 Mob: 628204005. Fax:
911822543

Good Swimming pool and gym (central):

CALLE FARMACIA, 13 28004 MADRID / tel: 918 289 006