

European option report

Why I chose to do the European Option:

Actually this subheading should actually be renamed 'why I chose to do medicine at Manchester' – and the main deciding factor for that was that Manchester medical school is the only medical school of its kind to offer a degree with a title pertaining to foreign language incorporation, experience and study. From among my choices, I opted for Manchester for this reason. I had taken French (and Spanish) until A2 level- a high level which I would have been really disappointed to have just let fall behind after I started medical school. Additionally, it looks a little different and adds a bonus point to my CV. There are approx. 7000 medical students who graduate each year from UK medical schools and this makes me stand out a little. Perhaps this is not of much relevance for foundation years but when it comes to specialty training- it does look interesting and discussion provoking. My current potential career plans include working in an area of high multiculturalism as a GP- something which my linguistic skills would be great for. This is why I opted for the EO.

For my European option place I was allocated to Paris, France. I left a few days after the exempting exam results came out (if I hadn't passed I probably would not have gone). I have to admit that I wasn't thrilled before going that I had to spend such an extensive period of time there just to graduate with European studies- given that my non-European studies counterparts are only obligated to spend 8 weeks away. However now I have returned, I can honestly say that it was the best thing I have done in my life- and I didn't want to leave. I truly felt like I belonged there.

Finding somewhere to live:

A colleague and I had decided to live together prior to travelling out, since neither of us had any accommodation situation sorted- she had initially made arrangements but these had fallen through and I never had any offer of student accommodation. This initially proved to be extremely difficult when we first arrived and the first full week was nothing short of stressful! My colleague travelled down by Eurostar because she lives in London, and I flew directly from Manchester. We first stayed in a hostel called arty which had reasonable reviews on hostelbookers (hostels can be risky business so it's definitely better to research them prior if you can!) due to the stress of finals and then finals results- although we tried to find an apartment together online before going, we were just not having any luck.

The first night we arrived, we checked in and used our internet at the hostel to get searching. We searched all day everyday for 5 days and nothing online came up. Our budget was reasonable- 750 euros each (£580) per month which as a combined total of 1500 should've realistically found us something appropriate- but the problem in Paris is that the rent is too high because there is a massive shortage of apartments available to rent out. There are also very strict laws protecting tenants (even if they don't pay for several months) so landlords are extremely wary to lend out to students, especially foreign students. The fact you are a medical student would be useful to mention as this is likely to reflect well and give you a higher chance of being successful in securing a flat.

We used the following websites among many others:

Seloger.fr (you have to pay agency fees so it is very expensive!)

Airbnb.com

But you must be careful because many of the posts on these websites are scams! The posts will try and get you to handover money before viewing and sending it across from your account into theirs. If this happens- Alarm bells should ring! Never agree to do this, and try and find a landlord with references and go and view the property at least once! Find out before you get to the country of your placement which hospital you will be working and have a look at the locality and see whether you can find accommodation that is appropriate in distance. Regardless of whether you are planning to find your own accommodation, it is nonetheless worth applying for university accommodation because some of them are really well priced, in a good location and have good facilities.

We stayed at the first hostel for 3 nights, then moved hostel, then into a temporary apartment (because it was cheaper) became aware of a student accommodation complex called cite Universitaire- which is home to 5000 international students from all around the world. This proved to be an amazing choice because it meant that we were able to meet so many new different people from all over the world, and be fully integrated into French student life. There were a variety of other advantages to this too, such as having 24 hour security, having direct links to the airport and Eurostar train line as well as being in a good location, 15 mins from central Paris and 3 mins from supermarkets.

Cite Universitaire is a highly over-subscribed complex campus, but I would highly recommend it. My friend and I lived in the United States house, we made some incredible unforgettable friends there- but if you want to speak only French, then it would be much more advisable to select one of the other houses. The houses they have include Morocco, Tunisia, Japan, Lebanon, Italy and Argentina- to name but a few. The website to apply for this accommodation is as follows- we actually filled out this form, but the administrative side of things takes so long that we ended up emailing the houses directly to ask if there were vacancies as this was a much more rapid and prompt approach- and it worked well!

This is the website for the complex:

<http://www.ciup.fr/en/>

We were lucky that the USA house had 2 available rooms. Mine was on the 5th (top) floor with the musicians, but I was not ever bothered by their rehearsals as I enjoy classical music, and actually because my room was purpose built, it had good sound proofing. The rooms have their own sink, but WC, shower and kitchen facilities are all shared. This was at a cost of 480 euros per month. For me it was value for money because of the sociability of living with other students, and the valuable friendships I ended up making. Other houses have different amenities and facilities, and they are priced differently too- I heard that the Belgian house has an en-suite in every room and that their rent is cheaper. If you are considering living in this place, I would contact the houses on an individual basis and enquire. It might even be worth making a trip to Paris for a weekend (if you book in advance you can find return trips for £80) which is an investment well worth making for you to carefully choose where you will be living and spending your time for your 4 months abroad.

My hospital experiences:

My first placement was at Hopital Cochin, on adult psychiatry. I was initially glad to have been given psychiatry as during medical school, it was a placement that I found easy and straightforward, and after finals I didn't want a placement that was too challenging for me to cope with. However, I hadn't really anticipated that in psych there are no examinations as such, it is practically all history taking and conversational- and thus from a linguistic point of view, it was quite a challenge! For the first week I would sit in with the other 'externes' (this is the equivalent of our stage, although more often than not they have another year to go) and watch them in order to learn key phrases and build up my confidence. The consultant was very welcoming, although not warm- which I found to be typical of French doctors, and indeed healthcare professionals in general. Most of them mean well, but there isn't that friendly open atmosphere how we have in the UK. I don't want to say this to put you off or to worry you, rather to prepare you and let you know that if you feel like you don't belong/are a burden/getting in the way/people aren't keen on you- don't take it personally. Honestly. I have friends who did and it made their placement a misery for a while. It's much better to just be yourself, to be astute and not let people take advantage of you being the foreign newbie. For instance, I was incorporated into a heavy schedule of on calls (gardes) which last more than 24 hours- which, after finals, was not a necessary requirement from Manchester medical school in the slightest. I thus was forthright in stating this and they reduced the number of these. I still participated in some, which is a great thing to do for the experience- and it often just happens that you see much more interesting things at those times of night-but don't agree to anything you are uncomfortable with. Push yourself but don't be out of your depth. After EO is something you've earned and should be enjoying, don't burn yourself out at the hospital such that you have no energy to enjoy all the other wonderful non-medical things that the city has to offer.

Psychiatry was a good placement. I would share a list of patients with the other externs and we would conduct review consultations. I would enquire about medication regimens, about mood, about side effects and general monitoring questions. I would take a concise history and document all of this. The first time I took a history from a patient, the doctor came in to see why I was taking so long- I showed him the notes I had made, and although I hadn't done anything wrong and he was kind about it- he told me to omit large chunks of information. I wouldn't necessarily advocate this, for I think clear thorough documentation is essential in medicine, particularly history taking- but if you are criticized for doing something in a British manner of teaching, just accept it and remember that each country and hospital has their own workings- this should not affect you in a way when you return to the UK. I was in on average 4/5 days a week, and since it was a day hospital (outpatients) there were no on calls for this placement. There would be some group therapy sessions weekly which I was invited to attend and I did- they revolved around OCD and other behavioural disorders and so I went along to see how the therapy worked, what was said and done and it was really insightful.

My second placement was at Necker children's hospital- this was a little further away from where I lived- 2-3 trains/trams and a commute of approximately 30 mins each way, 20 if I was lucky. However this hospital was spectacular and I would compare it to being the Great Ormond St hospital of Paris. It is internationally renowned and the clinicians and physicians who work there are incredibly intelligent and gifted doctors. The hospital is enormous and the layout isn't too difficult to get to grips with. There is a coffee shop in the hospital on the ground floor which is reasonably

priced in case you need a mid-morning perk. I had a placement in obstetrics and gynaecology- although at the hospital I was mostly doing obstetrics. I had ample opportunity to get stuck in, in theatre, doing many antenatal examinations, taking histories and clerking patients. One thing to note is that the varying departments should usually rotate among the students such that they have a week of every sub department- for instance I was on antenatal diagnostics for one week, and early pregnancy emergency department for another. This was useful especially if you weren't enjoying a particular placement- it meant that I was able to learn all about one small aspect and have another one to look forward to learning about which kept things fresh and interesting. The one note to mention is that the other French students may be seen as trying to 'step over' you and make you go to certain departments which they don't want to- I was expected to go to antenatal diagnostics twice without having had any experience in consultations, but I just raised this as a point and they accommodated my preference. I would say that most people in Paris had some kind of issue with their hospital placement at some time or other (bullying/differences in expectations etc./shifts , however the worst thing you can do is keep it all entirely to yourself. If you do, you start to worry that it is only happening to you and it can make the whole experience quite bitter but if you manage to maintain contact with the other French people out there (try and organise a monthly coffee for everyone in the same city?) then you'll realise that you're not alone and they can give you good advice about how to handle certain situations, especially if they have been through something similar. The hospital itself, Necker is outstanding and if you have an interest in Paediatrics or obs and gynae- I would highly recommend it.

French medicine vs UK medicine:

There are some stark differences between the UK and French medical systems. For us at MMS the standard length of the course is 5 years, and for France it is 6. At the end of medical school for us we have the national FPAS system for distributing jobs, whereas in France they have a very serious and difficult exam to sit- all medical students irrespective of medical school- all sit the same exam and this determines the town and specialty training they receive an offer for. We have our foundation years to do some general medicine and decide what we would like to specialise in, but they must decide immediately. In France in hospitals, doctors wear whatever they like such as jeans and trainers- but they wear a white coat ('blouse'), whereas of course here we simply wear smart and formal work wear. Another difference is the difference in expectation of French medical students compared to the English. Public hospitals (there are private ones also) in France pay their senior medical students a sum of around 150-200 euros plus travel expenses. This is a nominal pay which covers transportation and represents a form of pay for the work the students do. In French hospitals, from talking to my Manchester colleagues on their experiences, I found the externs would complete a lot of administrative tasks, such as chasing blood results and filing. Necker was different as it is a major teaching hospital and thus students there mainly shadowed as they do in the UK, learning from observations and helping out with small tasks.

On the first day you arrive into hospital, you should go to the bureau de personnel (HR dept.) and introduce yourself. They should give you a blouse, or certainly tell you how to find one if you don't provide your own. They might take a deposit for it so do not be surprised. If you keep your blouse in good condition, do not lose it or accidentally swap it for someone else's (they are often coded and allocated on an identifiable individual basis) then you will receive your money back. You should also receive a badge or ID card to wear around the hospital and for ease of access- if you do not, perhaps

enquire, and if one is required they will arrange this. Do not throw away your travel receipts as these are required by the hospital to prove you paid for your travel and so that they know how much to reimburse you.

You will also be required to take along a RIB (document from a French bank indicating your account details) so that the hospital's monthly pay and travel reimbursement money can be deposited. This is usually given on a variable basis, some hospitals would be the last Sunday of the month, others would be the last Friday etc. find out, and check on the day or the day after you expect your money- it is very handy to have access to this money! This and the Erasmus grant do go a long way in helping out with rent, groceries etc. - because it all adds up fast! Before you leave for abroad, ensure you have enough money. Halifax does a card known as 'Clarity' which is useful because you can shop with it anywhere in the world without any extra charges (except cash withdrawals at ATM). If you do need to withdraw cash, it is better to withdraw it in bulk/large amounts to minimise the frequency of this fee being applied. Apart from this, I would recommend a card known as the Cash Passport which is a travel card with a chip and pin, basically like a credit card which has money loaded onto it from home (parents?) or a set amount which you transfer yourself prior to going. It is useful in the same way as the clarity because of the lack of fees and it works in all the usual bars, restaurants, shops- anywhere you'd expect a card to, without the worry of carrying cash around, or having fees applied. You can load onto it in euros as well, and the currency conversion rate you get from them is usually among the best that are available, and this is better the greater the quantity of money you convert.

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

Well here are just some general tips which I wish people had told me prior to going to Paris:

- The best form of travel there is Navajo monthly (67 euro). You need to initially buy the card which is 5 euro, fill out your details on it and affix a passport photo image of yourself onto it and then you charge it each month. Unfortunately it is rigid in that it starts strictly on the first of every month and ends on the last. So if you buy it on the 17th of the month, it will not carry through to the 17th of the next month, it will only last until the 30th or 31st. Do not be tempted to not put a photo or fill out your details, I have a friend who was charged a 30 euro fine by the transport inspectors for failing to have personalised her Navigo (they think you share them)
- Take 2 passport photos with you if you have them already at home, if not- many metro stations print them. One for the Navigo, one for the medical school to create your university ID card.
- If you have a smartphone- download the wordreference app, it comes in very handy when you are struggling for a word!
- You should try and take an unlocked mobile phone abroad so you can simply buy a SIM to avoid roaming charges and pay a reasonable amount each month. The signal of Bouygues is good, Free mobile has cheap tariffs but is problematic at times (I got this one, but it worked out to be worth it for me because I could call over 100 international destinations landlines for free! Great for calling home to catch up with family on a regular basis. This will require a credit card to create your monthly subscription however.

- You will need to create a French bank account for your hospital wage to go into. This will require ID like your passport and also a 'justificatif de logement' - a document attesting where you live (your landlord or accommodation organisers should be able to give you this should you ask for it)
- Regardless of whether you are male or female (usually much more so if you are female)- you will be stared at/talked to in the street and receive unwanted attention. I would say the best way to deal with this is silence and ignoring the people because they usually stop- unless of course, you want a chat with them (!) Many of these people can be pushy, rude, provocative and demanding making such direct demands as 'give me your number' or 'where do you live'. Never give your personal details away.
- There are lifts at the metro so if you have luggage or shopping, you do not have to trudge up stairs or escalators with it (!) You would be surprised how late I found this out after lugging my large suitcases around!
- When you pick a hostel (if you need to at the beginning- make sure it has a lift for ease of transportation of your cases!)
- BUT DEFINITELY TRY AND ORGANISE ACCOMODATION OPTIONS BEFORE YOU GO- at least have your options open so you can decide when you get there, or maybe even make a visit to see what the options are.
- Ask about local recommendations for restaurants and bakeries- you will inevitably end up eating out a fair bit (customary in French culture to take an extended lunch break) and having the knowledge of the best ones is extremely useful.
- Don't buy bread from the supermarket- you are in the home of bread, it's just not right! You will most likely find a boulangerie on every 2nd street! No excuse!
- People smoke everywhere so if you are a non-smoker, just be prepared!
- There are extremely limited vegetarian options available- and if it is important for you to know, ask to double check that there isn't hidden chicken or fish stock in seemingly innocuous dishes such as vegetable broth and pies. There is an incredible vegan (yes vegan!) restaurant near to Chatelet (you will get to know this station all too well) called Le potager du marais, and it is wonderful!

But most importantly- just have fun! I honestly cannot emphasise how fast the 4 months have flown by, so make sure you make the most of it! Try and make a list of all the cultural, social, touristy things you would like to do and see and aim to see a certain number each week- 3 is a manageable number, and then when you return, you will realise that you managed to get through a lot this way! It is easy to spend a week in Paris as a tourist and think you have seen it all- and this is probably true. However, there are some less well known things to see and I would recommend them:

- The Shakespeare book company, St Michel
- Chateau de Vincennes
- Fontainebleau
- Jardin de Luxembourg
- Rue Moufflard/ Latin quarter- eat at Au p'tit Grec-the savoury crepes are insanely delicious and it is worth the queue! You will recognise it by being the one random creperie on the street which has a long line of people outside, although there are random times when you can be lucky and catch it fairly empty!

- Flea market at Porte de Clignancourt

Paris is full of places to discover and explore- despite the stress of the first week where we were essentially homeless- it was the best experience of my life and I loved it and didn't want to leave. I hope you feel the same and fall for Paris the same way I did.

End of report

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