

## Report: Erasmus in Paris 2015

### Why European Option?

I decided to join the European option programme when I moved to Manchester from St Andrews in third year for a number of reasons. Having grown up in a French-speaking country and attended a European school I enjoyed the links with France that were made through this programme. I also found the opportunity to go abroad on SSCs during third and fourth year very exciting. The idea of learning medical french and using it on placements whilst experiencing healthcare in a different country was just perfect for me!

The next choice was deciding where I wanted to go in France or Switzerland. I excluded Lausanne since I had already lived there for six months during my gap year and decided that I wanted a new experience. I did love my stay in Lausanne though so it is absolutely a great option! I chose Paris because it is a big place with lots going on and so much to explore. I thought that the opportunity to live in Paris would not arise that often in life!

I was delighted to find out that I had been allocated Paris Descartes, one of the universities in central Paris. We were then asked to make choices for placements and I was given one 8-week placement in neurosurgery and one in A&E. I was very happy with the A&E placement since this would be a good opportunity to see as many patients as possible and really get involved in the care. The neurosurgery placement was not what I had hoped for but since I find neurology a very interesting field I guessed that it would still be an interesting placement.

### Accommodation

Finding accommodation ended up being more difficult than I had thought. I decided to decline the university accommodation that was offered to me. I made this decision because of its location (very far north and far from my hospitals) and because I really wanted to find a flat share with French people. I ended up arriving in Paris without having a place and I stayed the first two nights in a hotel. It was a little bit stressful and I would recommend sorting somewhere to live before arriving! In the end I am very happy with the way it turned out. I found a flat share with two french boys and one half Mexican half German girl. We got on very well from day one and I spent a lot of time with them throughout my stay in Paris. The flat was very well located in the 15th arrondissement, very close to the metro station La Motte Picquet Grenelle which has four lines that go all over Paris. I was so lucky to find this flat since I made some great friends and was very well connected to all corners of Paris!

I found the flat through airbnb, but I would also recommend using websites like appartager and pap. There are ridiculously many rooms and flats available which is why I thought it would be easier to find somewhere but since I was only staying for four months, don't have a salary (they usually require a salary 3x the rent!) and my guarantor is abroad it was more difficult than expected!

As I mentioned, in the end I loved the flat, I was so lucky to live with people who really became my friends and the opportunity to speak french every day with my flat mates. I would recommend flat share over student accommodation or a studio since it is a lot more sociable.

The area where I lived, the 15th arrondissement, was great as well. It is in west Paris so not in the middle of the very busy and touristy parts. There are lots of bars and restaurants, it is very close to the Seine which is great during the warmer months and transport links to other parts of Paris are very easily accessible. It is also ideal for students

at Descartes in particular since most hospital are south of the river and easy to get to from La Motte Picquet Grenelle.

### My first placement: Neurosurgery at Centre Hospitalier Sainte Anne

The specialties of the placements were the only details we received before arriving in Paris. I did not know anything about my timetable, when to turn up on the first day or what sort of tasks I would have. To be honest I knew a little bit already about french administration and I was not particularly surprised. I thought I will turn up in the morning, explain who I am and take it from there!

After spending more than one hour searching through the entire hospital for the neurosurgery department I eventually found somebody who knew the consultant who was supposed to be in charge of me. The lady showed me to an office full of people dressed in white coats. I explained that I was a an Erasmus student beginning a placement at the department that day and that I was due to stay for a total of eight weeks. The majority of people sitting in the office turned out to be "externes", the french word for medical student in hospital, and they welcomed me and showed me around. I was given a white coat, actually somebody else's which meant that I wore a coat with the wrong name for a few weeks.

There was no introduction, no paper work, nobody even checked that I was who I told them that I was! I thought this was quite surprising, especially when comparing to the secured hospitals I am used to in England. I started off by following the ward round and told to be back at 8:40 AM the next morning. I was a little bit overwhelmed by being thrown into it like that but I was happy that everybody seemed friendly and welcoming.

Things got better and better, I understood exactly what my role was and what was really expected from me. In total there were about nine students attached to the neurosurgery department and we were spread over consultant-led clinics, operating theatres and the ward. On the ward we were allocated one wing each with approximately 10 patients. We were expected to read up on the patients, examine them and follow their progress during their stay on the ward. During the ward round the externes in charge were expected to follow the discussions, take notes and then carry out any jobs that were decided. These tasks are very similar to junior doctors' in the United Kingdom and in France students do it and work very independently but always under supervision of the "internes" (french junior doctors). In consultations we mainly observed and this was also the case in the operating theatre. I saw some very impressive surgeries and it was a great opportunity to see very specialised brain surgery. In terms of skills I did not get to assist very much but I was allowed to scrub up every day which was good practice.

### My second placement: Accident and Emergency Department at Hôpital Européen Georges Pompidou

This placement was better organised, we had an introduction meeting where we were given a tour and some information about the placement. The A&E department was divided into majors, minors and "portes" which was where patients were hospitalised for a short time before being hospitalised or discharged. The majority of cases in minors were trauma cases. Students swapped between the different departments to get as broad an experience as possible. The set up as placement was quite similar to A&E placements I have done in the United Kingdom in the way that students would see patients alone, take a history and examine the patient and then present the patient to a senior doctor. In majors I saw lots of interesting cases, everything from patients with complicated medical histories making it difficult to diagnose them to patients with difficult social histories (such as homeless people or elderly patients not coping at home), real emergencies such as strokes, MIs, DVTs, hypothermia, epileptic fits etc In the very complex cases my role of course mainly involved the easier tasks but in these cases it was very interesting to see how to deal with real emergencies. In the minors department I was more independent and saw less complicated medical cases such as renal colic, constipation, coughs and colds, UTIs etc as well as the majority of traumatology cases and wounds. The course of the day completely depended on which consultant was in charge as some of them wanted to be in charge of everything and felt the need to re-

examine each patient after having listened to my presentation and make up their own opinion entirely. In a way I guess this is safer and a more careful approach but I couldn't help but sometimes feel entirely useless since everything I did was done once more by somebody else. Other consultants, however, trusted my opinion and examination entirely and let me prescribe further investigations, medications and refer patients to other specialties. When this was the case I felt that I learned more and it was more enjoyable for me although sometimes I felt that I would be more comfortable if the consultants would see the patients as well. In some cases I told the doctors that I did not feel that it was appropriate that only I saw the patients and that I thought they should examine them as well. As mentioned previously, there were also a number of patients presenting with wounds which required suturing. At the beginning I observed when the consultants or junior doctors did the suturing, I was then supervised by a very nice consultant who walked me through the entire procedure. After that time I was allowed to suture wounds by myself without supervision! Towards the end of the placement I actually felt very confident when suturing. I believe this is a very important skill and I am delighted that I got the opportunity to practice this on a regular basis. I also got a number of opportunities to do orthopaedic exams of upper and lower limbs, recognise fractures and ligament injuries as well as analysing orthopaedic x-ray images.

In this hospital I regularly had lunch in the canteen. Students could buy a pack of ten tickets for 21 euros and each ticket was worth one main meal, side salad and fruit and dessert, all of this for 2.10 euros!! The food was really quite good and there was a enough choice every day. We would eat there with students from our department and sometimes I met up with students from other department (people I knew either from other placements or from Manchester). Sometimes I was invited to the "Salle de Garde" in hospital, this is a room where doctors can eat for free. It was really a bizarre experience! There a plenty of rules on how to behave and what you can and can't do in this room. For example when entering the room you have to make a tour of all doctors and tap them all on their backs, I guess it is a way to say hello to everybody. Then there are rules about not being allowed to speak on the phone, not being allowed to speak English (the French don't like the English!), not being allowed to use napkins (everybody would dry their hands after eating on the table cloth, which was actually a bed sheet), not being allowed to use small spoons for the dessert (instead everybody would eat with the back of their forks). It was really a very odd experience to see fully qualified consultants eating in this type of loud and messy environment! I enjoyed going to this room, mainly to see all the strange things that went on but I was always terrified that I would break the rule and get some sort of punishment since I had been told these could be bad. Medicine is traditionally very sexual in France and this was proved by the images drawn on the walls in the "Salle de Garde" as well as the comments and behaviour of most doctors. If you ever visit one of these dining rooms you will understand what I mean!

#### Differences between France and UK Medicine

I always knew that medicine would be more theoretical in France and I was expecting this when I arrived. I was also aware of the fact that we learn more communication skills and consultation skills in British medical schools.

My first placement turned out to be a ward run in a a very 'traditional' way. The hierarchy was remarkable and there was not a lot of respect shown towards the patients. Doctors spoke over the patients in medical jargon during the ward rounds and if the cases weren't interesting the doctors didn't bother at all. I found this behaviour rather shocking at first but I was reassured by the french medical students who confirmed that this was shocking to them too and not the way patients are usually treated in France.

My next placement was more like what I am used to, patients were treated with more dignity and all cases were dealt with properly.

There was however this difference in communication. In France doctors are more respected and patients should be happy to see a doctor and therefore are entirely expected to follow their advice. I feel that in the UK this is not always the case. Patients take more freedom to complain about their care and seem to expect more from their doctors. I am not sure what this is based on but I think it

may be an effect of the NHS. Everything is more independent in France, even though there is health insurance, people still pay a little bit for their healthcare and it is not taken for granted in the same way as in France.

At medical school in the UK we spend hours practising history taking and communication skills. We are tested in very challenging scenarios that we may never even come across in real life. This definitely prepares us to deal with any type of patient that we may meet during our career. This never happens in France, they do not have any communication skills classes, they do not learn the theory of how to speak to patients and how to deal with them. I believe this is lacking in the French system and it can be seen throughout their system.

Meanwhile, I do think we may have too much of it and I feel that some more theory and basic science would be beneficial in our system. It was however reassuring and a good experience to see that I appreciate the education I have had and that I feel confident about speaking to patients, even in French!

One difference which affects us students directly is that we have the opportunity to get payed! Just make sure you sign up with the other externes and the pay is about 200 euros per month, a nice extra pay considering how much there is to do and see whilst in Paris!

#### Linguistic Development

Since I grew up in a francophone country I was already quite confident in French and it is difficult to say that I have improved but I am sure that I have. I can feel that French comes a lot more fluently and I don't need to think as much when speaking. I follow conversations in French without problem. I also feel more confident with "everyday" French since I lived with French non-medics and therefore also had a social life in French.

#### Cultural experience

Culturally I had a fantastic experience. I used all my free time to visit places all over Paris. Towards the start of my stay I visited most of the tourist attractions. There are so many beautiful buildings, great museums, gardens, cathedrals, churches etc. My favourite museum is probably Musée d'Orsay and l'Orangerie, both with beautiful impressionist art. Of course all these places are definitely worth visiting and must-sees when you spend four months in Paris, but what I loved the most was strolling around exploring in all the areas. They are all very different and I really enjoyed walking around aimlessly just exploring and getting a feel for each arrondissement.

Another very important part when exploring France and Paris in particular is the food. It can be very expensive and in very touristy areas you might be unlucky with the food. However, with a little bit of knowledge and some tips from friends you can get excellent food and wine and it does not need to be very expensive!

I loved the food, the cheese, charcuterie, baguettes, patisseries, wines etc etc !!

Paris has pretty much everything of night life. Every area is different and has different types of bars and clubs. In general I did not end up going to clubs very much, mainly because in Paris it is not as big a thing and people tend to go to bars instead. There are great wine bars, cocktail bars, brasserie type bars with big terraces. Irish pubs are great for fun music and dancing and there is always a good atmosphere!

Other social events that are fun are those organised by the medical school. It can be a little bit difficult to find these events and know how to sign up but I would suggest that whoever is interested joins the AMPC (equivalent of Medsoc) group on Facebook. One of the best AMPC events I went to was the cheese and wine evening. It was only 3 euro and we got loads of very very good cheese and wine. They had invited a cheese connoisseur to speak about the cheeses, their age and origins and how best to eat them. They were very tasty! It was also a fun opportunity

to meet french medics and I even met a guy who is doing an erasmus in Manchester next year so I gave him some advice.

I did a little bit of travelling around France as well. The first trip I did, with one of my Manchester Erasmus friends, was signing up very spontaneously to a medics surf trip on the french west coast. We spent five days with 40 french medics in bungalows on the coast. It was a beautiful beach and we were very lucky with the weather. Despite not a great deal of previous surfing experience we learned the basics and improved over a few days. The last days we had a catamaran course, it was great fun! At night we did barbecues and bonfires on the beach and listened to our own medics band playing music. The atmosphere was great!

This trip was a great way to visit new parts of France, meet new people and practice our french. We were so happy that we went and would definitely recommend this type of trip to anyone doing an Erasmus in Paris!

Rather than going straight back to Paris myself, the other Manchester student and a german girl we met on the trip decided to rent a car and turn the return journey into a road trip. We started in Sables d'Olonne, a beach town on the west coast, and then drove slowly through lots of cute small villages all the way to Angers where we stayed the first night. We visited the castles, little cafes in the villages, stopped a number of times by the river Loire and we really enjoyed the fresh air that we don't get in Paris! The next day we carried on driving, stopping at a few chateaux on the way (Angers, Saumur, Azay le Rideau) and ended the day in Tours. Tours is a small student town with very pretty architecture and lots of terraces and bars. On our last day of the trip we visited La Clos Lucé (recommend it!!) and Chambered, one of the most famous chateaux of the Loire valley and finally Orléans: We then drove back to Paris and returned the car there. It was a great trip and I definitely recommend visiting this part of France if you get the chance.

May is full of bank holiday weekends in France so a great opportunity to do some trips out of Paris. One weekend we took a covoiturage (car-sharing, widely used in France) to Lyon and spent the weekend there. It is a great city, we had lovely weather, amazing food and met lots of fun people who showed us around! We stayed in a hostel in vieux Lyon with beautiful views of the city. I definitely recommend going to Lyon for the weekend.

### Ideas and future plans

I am now back in Manchester after four fantastic months in Paris and I must admit, I am very sad about being back. We had to come back for the PSA, portfolio review and ILS training day and leaving France for that when the weather was at its best and Paris more beautiful than ever was not easy... Looking back at my experience I am so happy about having done an Erasmus and really experienced parisian life for four months.

For the future I guess it just strengthens my wishes to live abroad and travel as much as possible with medicine. I am happy to know that I could work in French since this opens many doors all over the world, anything from Africa, the caribbean, Canada, Switzerland and of course France! This is something I will definitely be doing throughout my medical career.

Tips and useful addresses for erasmus student in Paris:

Bars:

- Le Baron Rouge: great wine bar in the 12th
- Le Comptoir General: very special bar in the 10th go during the day or at night
- in the summer; open air bars along the Seine, by Invalides or qual d'austerlitz
- Le Perchoir: very cool rooftop bar
- Ballroom: cocktail bar
- La converseerie: cocktail bar, very nice cocktails
- impasse des petites écuries; nice little street with lots of bars and terraces

- rue princesse in st germain
- rue montorgueil in the 2nd

Restaurants:

- Les Parigots: young crowd in a traditional brasserie, close to republique
- Les Fabricants: very busy and loud, lots of food, good price
- Bistrot d'Henri: very traditional bistro
- Cantine du troquet 15th
- Paul Bert

There is so much to say, email me if you need more! Enjoy!!