

**Motivation to Choose the European Studies programme**  
View across Lausanne

# European Studies Lausanne Report – 2014

The European Studies programme offers a fantastic opportunity to keep up a language throughout medical school and to apply this to the clinical environment. Since watching « Le Fabuleux Destin d'Amélie Poulain » when I was younger I have always wanted to be able to speak French fluently (yup, corny but true). Us Brits have a pretty poor reputation when it comes to languages, and so it is always nice to try to contradict the stereotype and give it a go. I have also aspired to live abroad at some point, after hearing countless stories on how much it can enrich your life experience and change your view on the world. As cliché-d as it may sound, I really enjoy and appreciate the insight into another culture a language can provide – a language helps you to understand the mindset of its people. When I stumbled across the 'European Option' when applying to medical school, it felt like a perfect match.

## **La Vie en Lausanne**

Lausanne is a beautiful town, with undulating, cobbled streets set against the dramatic backdrop off Lac Lemman and the mountains. The town has pockets of creative, vibrant and studenty areas and is reputed to have the best nightlife in Switzerland. Before you depart, you will hear a few different things about Switzerland, notably the high cost of living and the conservative and direct nature of its citizens. It is expensive, however you will be working the majority of the time and it doesn't take too long to adapt. As for the Swiss themselves, I found the majority of them to be supremely welcoming, patient and fun to be around. Lausanne itself is quite cosmopolitan and many of the hospital staff speak French as their second (third, or fourth language). This doesn't particularly impede comprehension, in fact in many cases, it can be quite helpful and they're very patient if you've forgotten how to phrase something.

### **Qui ne risque rien, n'a rien** (*Nothing ventured, nothing gained*)

By going to another country to practice medicine, you are constantly exposed to the uniformity of much of clinical medicine, as well as curious little differences. Here, it is routine to perform Murphy's punch test (in which you knock the back of your hand placed flat over the costovertebral angle for tenderness seen in pyelonephritis), which I had never seen on a ward in the UK before (despite having been placed on Urology twice!) In addition, patients seemed much more rigorously investigated here. A gentleman I clerked with suspected spinal stenosis had undergone multiple modes of medical imaging, a muscle biopsy and lumbar puncture.

I enjoyed the emphasis on the importance of the clinical examination here (neuroréhabilitation). The médecin assistants and I would take a history and perform a comprehensive examination, which would be reviewed by the chef du service whose knowledge and clinical finesse was great to watch. Great efforts were made to include the patient and their families in the setting of goals and management of expectations. However, there were still remnants of a more patriarchal doctor-patient relationship not as prevalent in the UK and the healthcare team could seem dismissive of certain patient concerns. I thought that overall our practical skills were better (I watched a registrar nervously perform her second ever ABG), though their academic knowledge was impressive – especially it seemed in neuroréhabilitation where all sorts of rare pathologies presented themselves.

Two of the placements I had chosen, Radiodiagnostics and Anatomie Pathologique, were very different to any placement I had taken before and so it was more difficult to objectively compare between the English and Swiss systems. Within radiology, I was expected to interpret and report a wide variety of radiological images (supervised and reviewed by the chef du service), which at times was a very daunting task and something I am not sure I would have been permitted to do as a medical student in the UK. As a student in pathology, I was able to witness and assist in multiple autopsies though it didn't carry the same responsibilities as the radiology placement.

Kindlifesserbrunnen (the baby-eating brute in Bern)

### **Linguistic Level**

I unfortunately wasn't successful on my first attempt at the C1 exam and furthermore took an intercalated year after fourth year so language-wise I felt unconfident. In retrospect, the content of the language lessons provided by the university was indeed very good and I did work hard, though it is difficult to do more than simply maintain your language level if you don't have a native speaker to practice with or do not spend time in a francophone country. Furthermore, in my intercalated and final years, I focused my efforts solely on passing my exams and didn't feel that I could devote the needed time to French. I took up an SSC in

St Cergue, a typical Swiss village up in the mountains

France in my third year, and would encourage students to take advantage of these opportunities as much as possible.

When I arrived on the ward I was very shy and my language level was lacklustre, though as I began to relax around my colleagues I came out my shell and became much more expressive. However, I would not simply rely on exposure on placement to improve your language level, I found that I needed to supplement and support it by consolidating (or socialising with Francophones) in the evening. I found that it was easier to speak French in a relaxed, social context (a beer and some raclette (slabs of melted cheese on just about anything) do wonders for easing you into speaking freely).

## **Stages**

### **Swiss Undergraduate Medical Education**

Swiss students complete five years under the university (in the later years also attending the ward with teaching in the afternoon), though their last (sixth) year is completely devoted to their month-long placements ('stages'). Here they play defined roles within the medical team and are expected to attend from 08:00-18:00, not too dissimilar to the Student Assistantship. As an Erasmus student, I was expected to play a similar role. In addition, like the local students, you may be interested to learn that we were paid around 730CHF a month for our work (even though it still felt as though we were very much students). This was in addition to our Erasmus grant. From speaking to Swiss medical students, my impression was that the curriculum was larger than that of Manchester Medical School (MMS), (for example forensic pathology was on the general curriculum for finals examinations). However, there was much less focus on communication with patients and their families, and I witnessed interactions such as Breaking Bad News which seemed quite abrupt. On the other hand, on neurorehabilitation the chef du clinique was extremely sensitive and empathic and broke bad news well despite not following a SPIKES format.

### **Culture of the Hospital**

I found many positives of the Swiss hospital working culture. I found the Swiss to be hard-working and earnest, who were dedicated to getting the job done and work long hours without complaint. I got the impression that professions of a different grade (e.g. doctors and nurses) were on the whole better at collaborating than I've witnessed back at home, which was refreshing. On the other hand, I found the approach to communication with patients and their families to be less personable than it is in the UK. The doctor-patient relationship follows the traditional paternal dynamic.

### **Neuroréhabilitation**

I chose this placement partially as my first choice of neurology was not available. By its very nature, the patients are medically stable the majority of the time and the focus is shifted to achieve long term goals, building up strength and regaining skills after cerebrovascular accidents and demyelinating disorders. Time is shared between twice weekly ward-rounds, colloques (MDT meetings), clerking arrivées and the day to day management of patients. As this was my first placement, I was very shy to

View of Batiment Hospitalier

begin with, though the team were all very patient and welcoming – as were the patients! However, I would hesitate to recommend it as a first choice, given that much of the time I struggled to find enough to do to fill my working day (08:00-18:00). I used this placement to focus on getting to grips with taking a history, sharpening up my neurological examination and to get two U-CEXs and a U-CMD signed off.

### **Radiodiagnostic**

I chose this placement on the basis that I felt that I did not yet have confidence in interpreting medical imaging and wanted to develop a good idea of what various imaging modalities could offer. The day started early with the morning colloque at 7:40am, though the time I finished varied. If the list of investigations were completed for a day, I was encouraged to leave earlier (sometimes as early as 16:45), however there were also afternoon colloques which would go on until 18:00.

I was first placed on Ultrasound, which was varied and interesting and offered a good insight into the value and limitations of ultrasound imaging. This was followed by a week of interpreting plain chest, abdominal and bone x-rays. Although I felt proficient in interpreting CXRs, abdominal plain films and pelvis x-rays, I had to learn how to interpret knee, elbow, wrist and foot films. I found this quite challenging, though the chefs de clinique were mostly very supportive and friendly. I was required to dictate reports as well, which was an important test of my French! I was then placed in CT interpretation, which admittedly I found very difficult, and finally on interventional radiology – in which I was encouraged to scrub in for procedures and enjoyed very much. I very much appreciated the fact that we rotated through different departments in radiology, so we were exposed to as many different imaging modalities as possible. At the end of the placement the stagiaires were directed to give a presentation on a radiological topic to the morning colloque. This was rather daunting, though very rewarding as the chefs were very supportive and encouraging.

### **Anatomie Pathologique**

My motivation for choosing this placement came from very much enjoying a pathology sign-up in second year, a hope that I could sharpen up my anatomy and histology before starting foundation training, and a realisation that I would probably not be able to take a placement like it for the rest of my career (given that I don't plan on going into pathology in the future). I would say that it achieved these objectives though perhaps I should have chosen to have my longest placement centred around patient contact, in order to best improve my French.

My general day started at 7:30am (though this is because I would come in early to check my emails), though morning colloques tended to start at 8:15am. The day generally went on until 17:00/17:30, though could also finish later if an autopsy came in mid-afternoon. At first I was placed with another stagiaire, which had its advantages as well as its draw-backs. I found that I was able to come out of my shell more when I was independent of the other stagiaire and it allowed me to become more autonomous. Through the placement I was able to observe and learn a lot about the processes involved in Macro (the bulk of which was analysing tumourectomies and biopsies before preparing for microscopy), ex-tempo (analysing material such as sentinel nodes that have just been removed in surgery, which may alter the course of the procedure), histology and microscopy, cytology and autopsy. The placement gave a great insight into the challenges of pathology – it certainly isn't as black and white as the textbooks would have you believe!

A view across Lac Leman.

## Questions Pratiques et Trucs à Faire

### Le Logement

I first contacted CHUV directly for accommodation – don't be alarmed if you are told they will not be able to tell you what they can offer until 2 weeks before the placement is due to start. CHUV accommodation generally does not come with internet. Also rather annoyingly, they require you to pay your rent from a Swiss bank account from the canton (Vaud) (which you cannot set up until you arrive). However, do also ask UNIL (the university) about accommodation as they may be able to offer you a cheaper alternative reminiscent of student halls (most of which do have internet). Expect to pay upwards of 600CHF a month for accommodation, and you may need to pay a deposit (la garantie) equivalent of 1-2 months' rent. The housing situation is very stretched in Lausanne, though the logement services go to great lengths to ensure that you'll have somewhere to live.

Logement@chuv.ch – Accommodation provided by the hospital – self-contained studio. logement@unil.ch – Suggestions for house-shares, lodging. falaises@fmel.ch – Student halls-type accommodation, where most stagiaires stayed.

### Les Courses

You will quickly become accustomed to everything being shut by 7pm on a weekday, 5pm on a Saturday, and closed on a Sunday. There are a handful of places across town open on a Sunday (Agip service stations, the Coop at the train station), though these are also very expensive.

Depending where you live, there are a number of different supermarkets. At Porte de Chailly, where my studio was, there was a Denner (like a slightly downmarket Lidl) and Migros (wholesome but expensive, a shop that doesn't sell alcohol due to its 'family values'). Though, if you're inclined to get the metro, in town there was also an Aldi that proved popular with many of the students. At the weekend, there are also great markets throughout the town centre and especially at Place de la Riponne. Groceries are expensive, especially meat, though if you're prepared to eat quasi-vegetarian then it is affordable.

### La Vie Nocturne

Les Lausannois are enthusiastic patrons of bars and restaurants, many places being full to the brim even mid-week.

☐ Zooburger – a small bar (that is often full) that has a warm atmosphere, friendly staff and serve good beers (and of course, burgers!)

☐ The Great Escape – very popular, especially with expats. Renowned for rowdy weekends and dancing on the tables is routine. Mostly plays classic good music, though also has themed nights (where things can take a cheesy turn). A good place to watch football, and – shock! – it's open on a Sunday!

☐ Bleu Léopard – A cool little music venue and bar that also serves good, honest food.

☐ Punk Bar - Contrary to the name not at all punk, and a lot less grungy than a lot of the other bars (though I like grungy).

☐ Club D – Larger music venue.

☐ Mad club – Proclaimed to be the largest club in Switzerland, is akin to Sankeys. When I went the music was awful (though if you like your chart music, with a group of friends in tow, it can be really quite fun). Expensive unless you go with the Erasmus group.

Curious stonework outside Lausanne cathedral

## Les excursions et Projets

I found it easy to get around Lausanne without the use of public transport, though with the infamous Lausanne *pent*, this isn't for everyone.

If you plan on using the trains regularly to visit other cities, or simply go home, then it may be worth considering buying the demi-tarif, which offers half-price train fares and a third off metro tickets. I calculated how much I would need to spend on train fares in order to break even, and decided that it wasn't worth it. However, many students did purchase it and made good use of it. As far as places to visit, I would recommend:

☐ Bern – The capital and a great representation of German Swiss culture. You can even go see the bears, just a quick walk over the river from the city centre, who are the city's mascots. They have a new, much larger enclosure which allows you to get quite near these magnificent creatures. Also on offer is Einstein's house, puppet theatres and Brezels (pretzels) -a-plenty.

☐ Nyon – A very pretty little city half way to Geneva with roman remnants.

While you're here, there is Cully Jazz festival (early April) and the 20km de Lausanne (end of April) which make your stay memorable.

## Conseil *(also, see below for checklist)*

☒ Preparation – yes, easier said than done when Exempting is looming, though very much worth it.

☐ There are many important dates not to miss – such as deadlines for the Foundation application.

☐ Ask yourself what you would like to get from your placement – would you like a busy environment (chirurgie thoracique), to do take a placement not routinely offered in medical school (radiodiagnostic, anatomie pathologique), or do you want to become slick at taking histories (medicine interne)?

☐ Complete paperwork when you receive it – it isn't as scary as it looks and becomes very stressful if you let it build up.

☐ Ensure that you have all (or as many as you can) of your UPSAs signed off BEFORE you go – my impression was that the doctors here seldom perform procedures such as cannulation or catheterisation here – these are performed by the nurses.

A bear of Bern

## Ideas and Future Plans

Although I have never set my sights on working in France or Switzerland, having always wanted to work for the NHS, I will certainly be keeping up my French. It opens up opportunities – with further language tuition I believe that I could practice in a francophone country. Though, for now I hope to join the Anglo-French Medical Society, with the aim in mind of becoming a fluent French speaker. I would also like to use the confidence this has given me to take up other languages (to sharpen up my GCSE-level Spanish and start learning Arabic). What the European Option certainly does give you, is the appetite and courage to inject a little bit more adventure in your life.

## Conclusion

I was very glad that I chose to take my European Option placement in Lausanne. I selected Switzerland as I was interested in immersing myself into a culture I had not experienced before. CHUV offers great opportunities and support to Erasmus students, to whom they are accustomed to hosting. Although Switzerland is indeed expensive, the 733CHF nominal stagiaire salary we received for our work certainly made it financially easier. This land-locked multi-cultural country is incredibly heterogeneous, with great opportunity for adventure.

**On arrival** - I found that it was useful to have a few days before starting the placement to (what will feel like) running around town from bureau to bureau. It's one way of learning your way around the place quickly!

○ Register at Le Contrôle des Habitants. You will need :

- A blue (unless they've changed the colour) arrival form that you will find at the bureau itself, that you can fill in while you're waiting.
- Your 'Attestation' of your placement at the hospital, to confirm that you are a student.
- A photo-copy of your birth certificate, passport.
- EHIC (in date !)
- Around 30CHF

○ Present yourself to Secrétaire d'unité, Ecole de Médecine office at Rue du Bugnon 21 (opposite the main hospital building, BU21 on the map).

○ You will need to bring your 'Diplôme de français professionnel – Médical B2' certificate (or higher) which they will photocopy.

○ Here you can pick up your student card if you sent the passport photo in advance.

○ Go to the lingerie to pick up a white coat with your ID badge at Hôpital Orthopédique. You can pick up to three at a time, though I instead went once a week to exchange my white coat at the machines.

#### **To do list – Before you Go**

○ April Year 4 – Choose your placements from the catalogue of UNIL Stages :

<https://applicationspub.unil.ch/interpub/noauth/php/Me/MeStald.php>

The canton is Vaud, and from these options choose those that appeal. It may be an idea to select more than four as you are unlikely to get all of your choices. When registering online with the Université de Lausanne (UNIL), confirm that as a stagiaire you will be in the '2<sup>ème</sup> année Maîtrise'.

○ Install Eduroam on your iPad/smartphone/laptop

Search for 'Eduroam' on the IT services desk ([www.itservices.manchester.ac.uk/contacts/](http://www.itservices.manchester.ac.uk/contacts/)), to find instructions on how to download the profile directly onto your device. The Eduroam network provides wifi connection around the hospital and UNIL.

○ Install Manchester VPN client – which you can use to access content available back in the UK, such as BBCiPlayer !

○ Install the BNF on your iPad before you go – prescribing is quite different here (they use brand rather than generic names) so you will be harking after the BNF for any PSA revision (and to prevent your brain from melting completely, confronted by all these new drugs names)!

○ September, Year 5 – Return your forms 'Inscription des Stages', as well as a passport photo to UNIL for a student card. You do not have to send a passport photo for your hospital ID badge yet as this will be sorted on your first morning attending 'Les Allières' (human resources) – though do remember to bring passport photos with you then .

○ Have passport photos taken (I remember finding this surprisingly difficult in Manchester). If in doubt, go to the GMPTE office on Piccadilly Gardens. If you do not have time before you arrive, there is a passport photo booth in Contrôle des Habitants.

○ Sort out accommodation (see above for details).

### Departing -

- ☐ Hand in 'Avis de Départ' at Le Contrôle des Habitants. This involves filling in a yellow form that you find at the office. You need to do this **no later than 8 days before you leave**, and can hand it in any time from a month before you are due to leave.
- ☐ Have Certificate of Attendance signed by coordinator of mobility at the medical school, which is then faxed or emailed back to the University of Manchester. This needs to be done in the last week so that your Erasmus funding can be calculated accurately.
- ☐ 'Transcript of Study' – speak to the bureau de l'école de médecine to arrange a transcript of study once you have handed in all of your 'évaluation de stage' sheets.
- ☐ On your last day, hand in your badge, return your white coats.
- ☐ Within 30 days of your return, complete online Erasmus questionnaire (the details of which will be emailed to you once you're back).
- ☐ Write StEP reflective piece as well as your report for the European Option (just like this!).

Thank you to my Dad, for the photos.