European Option Report
Lausanne 2014

Why I chose European Studies

The European studies program was the main reason I chose to come to Manchester University. As one of the few medical schools that offers a language alongside Medicine, I would highly recommend the program to all prospective students, and for students who are at Manchester who are considering the European Option. For me, there are many benefits to the European Studies program.

During medical school, I really enjoyed being able to regularly develop skills in something outside of medicine. Instead of adding to an already busy workload, I really valued the time I spent on French, as it was a really welcome break from medicine and meant that I was much more organized and time efficient in completing my PBL work. It really opened up opportunities in the clinical years, as I undertook one of my SSC blocks in the south of France – this was an invaluable experience, both in terms of putting my French to the test, and in my medical learning as I was able to learn about medical practice in a different environment. Going into Foundation training I feel that these experiences have both molded the way in which I practice medicine, the way in which I interact with colleagues and I feel much more open to taking time out of the standard training programs in the future in order to gain more international experience.

In terms of career benefits, one of my main motivations for undertaking the program was my interest in working in Humanitarian aid. In many of the major international organizations speaking French is of a huge benefit (if not a minimum requirement), and my undertaking the European Studies program you also receive an internationally recognized qualification (the DALF C1).

I put Lausanne as my first choice for my European Studies placement. I wanted to contrast the Swiss health system with my experiences of working in France. Lausanne has a reputation of being very international, with doctors from over 160 countries working in CHUV. With stricter immigration rules recently introduced in Switzerland, I thought this would be one of my only opportunities to work in such an interesting environment. I also wanted to experience living in a smaller city.

Life in Lausanne

I am so glad I put Lausanne as my first choice for placement. I was a little nervous about the finances of living in one of the most expensive cities in the world, but as soon as you get over the change to a diet of pasta, cheese and chocolate, it is a beautiful place to live and work (and I can't wait to go back again!) If you love the great outdoors, Lausanne has got it all – you're so close to the ski slopes in the winter, and as it gets warmer there are some great walks into the mountains and some great running and cycle routes along the waterfront and into the vineyards.

The Great Outdoors

With some fantastic slopes on your doorstep and in prime ski season, skiing is a must whilst in Lausanne. There are lots of places nearby, with a variety of different difficulty levels. Previous students had gone to the nearby Les Diablerets – I didn't go but I have heard its pretty good. We went for a one day trip to Les Chaccots near to Lausanne (a recommendation from one of the medecin assistants), a little local slope but great for getting your ski legs and doing a bit of exploring, with some gorgeous runs through trees at a third of the price with less queues. I also took a trip up to Verbier, expensive but worth it when you don't have to pay for accommodation! Some of the students in our accommodation went across as a group to Porte du Soleil, and there is a ski weekend organized by the Erasmus group at Unil which is really cheap, so plenty of opportunities! If you've bought a Demi-tarif card (see below in Practical issues) this works on lift passes too so definitely a big help in keeping costs low.

The best bits of the Alps were these little gems so I hope you manage to enjoy them as much as we did! If you head down to the tourist information office by the waterfront in Montreux, they will be able to give you a map of walks starting from Vevey and Montreux up in to the Mountains. They all recommend starting them in June, but March was perfect, in a few of them you reach the snow line and the views and the forests are absolutely stunning, only made better with a packed lunch of swiss bread and cheese. My favourite was getting the Funicular up from Vevey to Mount Pelerin, there's then a walk up through the forest and in a little loop, and you end up back at a restaurant where you started which has fondue that's almost as incredible as the views. I also did a couple of runs & cycle rides out from Ouchy along the edge of the Lake towards Lavaux (the vineyards). Bikes can be hired through

the PubliBike system (like Boris bikes in London!) for CHF 10.00 for a day, you just have to buy the daypass from the Bike shop under the arches at Flon. When the sun comes out there are Pedalo's for hire on the waterfront at Ouchy, they aren't cheap (CHF 22 for an hour), bit definitely worth it for the incredible views of the lake and the mountains.

And if after all of that you feel that you really need a break, head to one of the Bains Thermals; there are loads in the region and are absolutely incredible. I went to Yverdon-les-Bains, Lavey and Ovrannaz. Lavey was by far the best but a little bit of a trek – if you fancy a nice walk you can get off the train at Aigle and walk along the Rhone to St Maurice (follow the Route 1 cycle route); beautiful on a sunny day!

Exploring Switzerland

Switzerland is such a varied country – and I was really glad we used the weekends to do some exploring of some of the towns and cities outside of Lausanne.

On our first weekend we went to Gruyeres to visit the village and to go to the original Nestle chocolate factory. Luckily one of the students had a car, and this made getting around much easier, but some of our friends caught the train and said it wasn't too difficult. The chocolate factory is incredible – they promise chocolate tasting at the end, but they didn't mention that it's an all-you-can-eat tasting session!

The castle at Montreux called Chateau de Chillon is definitely also worth a visit, especially at the start of the placement when it is still a little grey! There's a nice walk along the waterfront from Montreux to the castle.

One of the best things we did whilst in Lausanne was to go to Sion (in the next Canton) for Carnivale. There's a big parade through the town, with bands from all over Switzerland. The music is known as "Guggenmusik" and is definitely worth the experience!

I would also recommend a trip to Bern – its not as far as you'd think on the train, and in the centre of the city there is an outdoor park with the famous bears of Bern. We timed it just right (by complete chance) and went to visit just as they had come out of hibernation!

Food/ Eating out

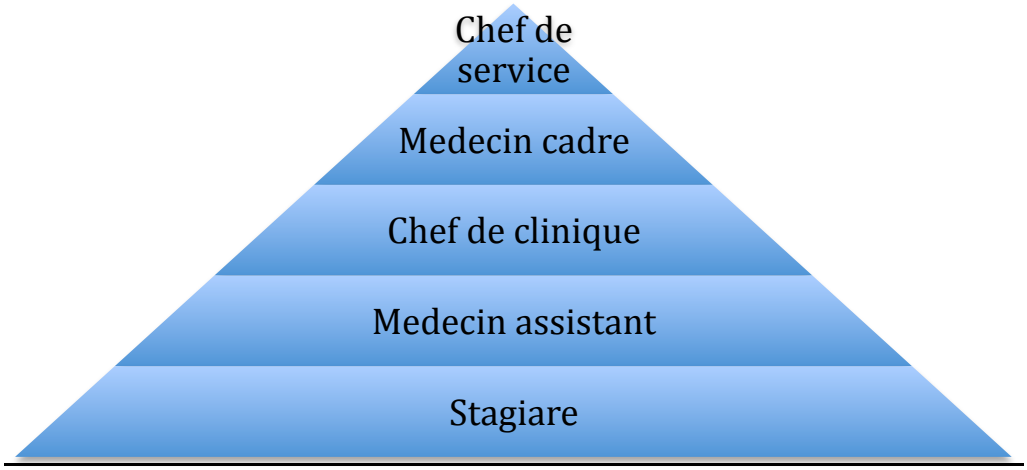
I struggled a little with the food in Lausanne – as a bit of a foody there is only so much cheese and chocolate I could take, and the extortionate cost of food in the supermarket meant that I ended up vegetarian and on a diet of pasta and bread. There's an Aldi below the metro stop at Bessières, and a Coop as you come out from the metro that has a lot more variety. On a Saturday morning there is also a huge market running from Riponne down to Flon – the cheese tarts are an absolute must!

If you do fancy eating out, there is a great burger bar called Holy Cow near to Bessieres, and the burgers at the Great Escape (see below!) were even better. The best fondue we had was at the

restaurant right next to the Cathedral. The Great Escape at Riponne was my favourite place in Lausanne. It's great for meeting other Erasmus students or expats and always seems to be packed! During the day the food is really good, and on the weekends they show all of the English football matches; a brilliant atmosphere and a little slice of home if you're feeling a bit homesick!

Placements

Hospital structure
The structure of doctors in a Swiss hospital was very baffling when I arrived, not helped by the fact that some of the medecin assistants (about the equivalent of an FY2) rotate between jobs, and others don't, so I have outlined the main grades in the diagram below. Once finishing medical school in Switzerland, newly qualified doctors apply directly to a department and a specialty. As a stagiaire your role is similar to that of an FY1 in the UK; whilst this was a little daunting at first it was great practice prior to starting work in August, and has given me a huge confidence boost in jumping the gap between student and doctor.



ENT
I started on ENT for my first placement, and this was my favourite block whilst in Lausanne. It was my 7th choice, but I was really pleased in the end. I had never done ENT whilst in Manchester, and felt this placement gave me a great overview of the specialty, and allowed me to be involved in clinics, theatre and endoscopy. One of the aspects of the placement I enjoyed the most was spending time in "Polyclinic". Here, there were a variety of routine and emergency appointments – stagiares were expected to take a history from and examine patients, before presenting to one of the doctors and proposing a management plan. We were also involved in treatment, being able to assist in theatre and in minor ops in clinic. I felt this placement had the perfect balance, of developing clinical skills I had never had the opportunity to learn, and also speaking a lot of French and developing my language skills. Days normally started at 7:45 with the morning "colloque" or handover, and usually ended by 4:30/5pm.

Nephrology
I wouldn't recommend this placement for future students. I had applied to do nephrology as I'd never had a renal placement in the UK, but coming from ENT where I had been so involved, I found this placement really frustrating. I worked on the chronic dialysis unit for 2 weeks, where I shadowed the doctors on their twice daily ward rounds, and observed in a couple of clinics a week. Whilst the clinical content was interesting, I was expected to spend the majority of my time observing, and felt this didn't improve either my clinical nor language skills. The

second 2 weeks were spent on the acute dialysis unit, and whilst it was interesting to work with different teams in the hospital and cross over between a variety of different specialties, I didn't feel very involved and was only able to see patients on my own on a couple of occasions.

ICU
Due to needing to be back in the UK for the final week of placement in May, I spent 7 weeks (my last two blocks) on ICU. This was a very challenging placement, but I really enjoyed it. Hours were very long, starting at 7:15am for the morning colloque and teaching/journal club, and ending at 6pm or later in the evening. In addition, as a stagiaire you were expected to do some night shifts too. Despite these long hours, I thought this placement was fantastic. Following the frustrations of Nephrology, I made sure I made my own list of objectives, and these were really taken on board by my supervisors and they went above and beyond to ensure I had as much experience as possible. Day to day I took part in the morning ward rounds, taking responsibility for my own patients (examining them, discussing any changes/concerns with the nursing team, writing in their notes, prescribing and organizing reviews/scans). I also learnt how to put ART, subclavical and femoral lines in, as well as performed a couple of Lumbar punctures. In Switzerland the ICU unit also covers medical resus ("dechoc") and carries the bleep for all arrests in the hospital, so I was also involved in this. I was also involved in some of the more challenging aspects of ICU, and learnt about organ donation, end of life care and breaking bad news. The team were really very welcoming (the Chef de Service is head of stagiares in the whole of the hospital), and really took the time to teach and explain things to me. There is also a really good post-graduate teaching program, and so I was able to attend many of the lectures and symposiums with the medecin assistants. This helped hugely in improving my medical knowledge in intensive care, but also allowed me to observe some of the inter-hospital teaching between CHUV and HUG (Hopital Universitaire Geneva). Overall I feel like this was the perfect last placement of medical school, and has been invaluable in boosting my confidence ahead of starting as an FY1 in a few months time.

Differences between Switzerland and the UK

There are many differences between the Swiss healthcare system and the NHS. The Swiss system is funded by private insurance, which is accessible on different tiers. A decent health cover costs roughly £400 a month, with the highest tiers being much more costly than that. For those that can't afford insurance, a government cover is available, however this does have a limit for the level of care that can be provided. Those at the highest end of the spectrum have access to private rooms in the hospital, which are much more like hotel rooms, with views over the Lake, a newspaper and refreshment service, and private consultants. I found the financial aspects of the system a little shocking – especially when I found out one of our renal patients was normally resident in Dubai, and paid a consultant privately to fly over and have access to his care, and he was put as a priority over the local patients. However, on the other hand, the access to care provided to all patients was much higher than here in the UK. CHUV has enormous amounts of research funding, and so patients that would have reached their ceiling of care here, are offered treatment to the level of current medical knowledge and in this sense is much more similar to the healthcare system in the States.

The Swiss have a wonderful concept of time. If the morning colloque starts at 7am, and you are late by 5 minutes, then in Swiss timing you are 5 minutes multiplied by the number of people in the room (usually 20 +), making you in fact 1 hour 40 minutes of time wasted! This concept is incredibly frustrating at the start, but by the end of the placement I feel like I make so much more of an effort to be exactly on time, and I'm much more time effective and organized!

The working hours in Switzerland are much longer than in the UK, but I felt that the pace at which they worked was much slower. Days start early, usually between 7 and 8, and end after 5pm. One of the nicest things, however, is that the whole team (from stagiaires to chef de service) eat lunch together in the canteen every day. I was really grateful for this, as it allowed me to integrate into the team and it also forced me to speak in French conversationally. It was a little intimidating to start, but one of the nicest things about Lausanne is that many of the doctors speak French as a second (or fifth!) language, and so really appreciate the effort you make to speak French, and also help you out and don't get frustrated when you stumble or get a little stuck.

Benefits of the experience

I'm so glad that I undertook this placement as part of the European Studies program, and that I undertook my placement in Switzerland.

In terms of linguistic development, my confidence and fluency improved dramatically over the 4 months. To start I was quite tentative about speaking French, but by the end I was quite happy discussing patients over the telephone with other doctors and writing in the notes. There is a notable difference between Swiss and Parisian French, and whilst I really appreciated the relaxed approach to the language (a lot of Swissisms are English verbs with a French accent), my French is perhaps not as accurate as it might have been had I spent my time in Paris. However, I liked the fact that because everyone made such a huge effort to help me understand and be understood, I was so encouraged to speak and chat away even if what I was saying wasn't 100% accurate.

My experiences in Switzerland have really opened my eyes to the differences in practicing medicine in different countries, but also how similar it really is. By working in such an international environment and with people from so many different places and backgrounds, I feel that it will enable me to be much more aware of the challenges faced by doctors in the NHS that haven't been trained in the UK, and to be more sensitive and helpful to this. I really enjoyed making friends with people from all around the world, and enjoyed communicating in a mix of different languages (we'd often start in French, then throw in English or Italian or Spanish words if we got stuck).

The experience has made me much more open to working abroad in the future – even in an environment where the language spoken isn't French or English, as I have realized that despite being challenging, it is amazing how much you can pick up by being totally emerged in a language. There were many doctors that I met that hadn't spoken a word of French prior to arriving in Switzerland, and I really admire and aspire to being as open as this in making my career choices in the future. The experience has also made me really value the NHS, and the ideals that are really important to us in the UK. Good communication is such an integral part of our medical training at Manchester, and my experiences abroad have made me really value this, especially in breaking bad news and dealing with relatives. There are certain aspects of my Swiss experience that I hope to build on when starting work in the UK, especially their approach to punctuality!

Practical issues

The Swiss love their paperwork! A lot of the preparation for, commencement and finishing of our time in Switzerland involved endless amounts of form filling, which is only compounded by the fact that you can only sort out most things during office hours in the week (whilst you're on placement from 7-5), and offices are closed for lunch for two hours in the middle of the day. I don't think there was really much solution for this, other than asking for a morning/afternoon off at the start and end of the 4 months to sort it all out – everyone I spoke to didn't have any issues with this as our supervisors had many a time encountered the same frustrations! Just make sure you're organized and bring plenty of passport photos, and account for extra charges for things – particularly at the start!

University:

- You will be sent your contract for UNIL prior to starting where you will select your placements. You need to sign this and then they will send you some documents with a signature and stamp for each placement. Don't forget to bring these with you to Switzerland!
- Erasmus paperwork – You will need to complete some forms before you come and then will be sent your Mastercard with Erasmus grant. Don't forget to get your paperwork signed before you leave Lausanne (by the medical school) to get the rest of your grant.

CHUV:

- Hospital badge: Bring a passport photo with you on your first day for this and CHF20 deposit. You then use this to pay for food in the hospital by topping up at the black box next to the front door of the canteen.
- White coat: You will be given a form to sign on your first day – hold onto this as you'll need it to be signed on your last day before you leave!

Other:

- Health insurance: Don't worry about going directly to the office for this – you can just scan in and email them a copy of your European Health Insurance Card and they will send you an exemption certificate (see contact below for the Office Vaudois de l'assurance-maladie)
- Residence permit: You need to go to the Bureau des Etrangeres in Flon to fill out the paperwork for a residence permit as you will be staying in Switzerland over the limit of 3 months. Everyone I spoke to paid a different price for the permit ranging from nothing to CHF95… But from the guidance from UNIL I think it should be about CHF65. They will then post you your permit after about 3 weeks.
- Demi-tarif: I bought the Demi tariff pass from the train station and I thought it was definitely worth it. It costs CHF175, and entitles you to half price on all bus/metro/train travel, and also gives you discounts for lift passes. Trains are expensive in Switzerland but reasonable with this pass.

Useful contacts

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