

European Option Report – Lyon, France 2014

Why did I choose to study on the European studies programme?

I was vaguely aware of opportunity to learn a European language when I enrolled at Manchester and it had struck me as something that no other medical school seemed to offer. So when the proposition came to hear about and apply for the programme in first year, I went along to find out.

I had studied French up until A-level but had just come from doing a 3 year science degree in which I had no contact with the French language at all. However they told us about the prospect of doing SSCs in France, and ultimately the chance to do a final full semester placement there after the exempting exam in 5th year.

That final placement seemed like a long way away but it all seemed like a great opportunity, and although the midweek French lessons sometimes seemed like a bit of a nightmare (particularly during the clinical years), the final placement soon came around and it felt worth it!

Arriving in Lyon

I flew from Manchester to Lyon with another student the weekend before we were due to start. The Rhonexpress train takes you from the airport into Lyon and a single ticket costs about 14 euros. We got off at Gare Part Dieu and from there got on the metro to the hotel we were staying at for the first two nights (it's not possible to move into halls on the weekend, so consider this when planning your journey). The metro is really easy to use, and when you get there buy a carnet of 10 student tickets just to keep you going until you get a travel card.

Having the first weekend in a hotel was great, and we pretty much just did tourist stuff and got to know Lyon a little bit. The city is based around two rivers, the Saone and the Rhone, which run parallel to each other north to south and then join at 'Confluence'. The area in between the two rivers is 'Presqu'île' (because it's nearly an island). To the west of Presqu'île is Vieux Lyon (the touristy part of town where you find lots of traditional 'bouchon' restaurants), Fourvier the big catholic basilica, and the Lyon Eiffel Tower. On the hill to the north is Croix Rousse (the old silk producing part of town which is now home to lots of upmarket flats, bars and restaurants), and to the east there is the commercial district and lots of residential areas.

When you arrive, try and get yourself a TCL travel card as soon as possible from the office in Bellecour metro station. It costs 15 euros to buy the card, and 28 euros each month for unlimited travel on any buses, trams or metro. It works out a lot cheaper to do this and makes things so much more simple.

Accommodation

We were supposed to be moving into Mermoz halls of residence, but when we arrived on the Monday it was apparent they had not received an application on my behalf, despite me having received written confirmation of a room there from the medical school Erasmus coordinator! Luckily they offered us both rooms in La Residence Andre Allix, which is on the other side of town near Fourvier.

Andre Allix is in a slightly nicer area than Mermoz, and is built around an old fort. In the area surrounding it there is a town with shops and a supermarket about 15 minutes away on the bus.

On arrival at the office on the 27th January we were asked to pay a deposit of 150 euros, and to our dismay they also informed us that we needed to pay rent for the entire month of January

despite the fact that we were only going to be spending 4 days of it in the rooms. Be aware of this if you are going to stay in halls! If you do, request it from the start of February and save yourself a month's rent.

The base rent is about 180 euros, add in internet and bed sheets and it comes to 200 euros per month. My room had a single bed, a sink and a fridge and was pretty comfortable. Showers and toilets are shared amongst the corridor of students, and the kitchens too. The kitchens have a microwave, a couple of hobs and a sink. We had to buy some pans, plates and cutlery, and also a kettle each. Once we had these things though we could make one pot meals and eat fairly well.

Andre Allix has mostly foreign students with the majority being from the Far East, so in terms of meeting and talking to French students to improve your language it is not ideal. This doesn't matter too much though, as we just used to halls as a base and spent most of our time either on placement or socialising with other Erasmus students.

Word of warning, the staff in the accommodation office at this halls can be slightly rude at times, and do not expect any compromises to be made for you!

For a 4 month stay this was perfectly liveable, and affordable within the budget of the Erasmus grant. However if you want a more central location and more contact with French people and students, I would recommend doing a flat share or staying with a family but it will set you back at least 400 euros a month. leboncoin.com is a useful site for finding a place, but do it well in advance of getting to France!

Things to bring with you

- Plenty of passport photos!
- Photocopies of your passport, European Health Insurance Card, and the University of Manchester documents that you are bringing with you.
- Bring your university of Manchester vaccination record, and have copies of it to give to the admin staff.

Registering at University Claude Bernard - Lyon Est

There is a significant amount of admin to be done when you arrive at Lyon Est, so much so that it took us 3 days to complete! The faculty Erasmus coordinator only works in the afternoons so be aware of this when arriving. There are many registration documents to be filled in, and your plentiful supply of passport photos will come in handy here. As well as the faculty registration, we were told we needed to go to occupational health, and also go and buy ourselves medico legal insurance cover. Only after these things are done would we be allowed to start in hospital.

The occupational health centre was on another campus in a different part of town, and we got very lost finding it as we did not know our way round the transport system at this point! When we arrived there they were not expecting us, but we were handed on to one of the doctors in the family planning clinic who had a look at our documents and stamped them for us.

The next day we went to the medico legal insurance office in town, only to find it was closed all day! We went back the next day and bought the insurance we needed for 30 euros, then we could take it back to the faculty that afternoon for it to be copied and ticked off. Make sure you get a copy of your placements here too.

Try and pick up your medical student card at one of these visits to the faculty. It is not used as ID (the students don't wear any ID badges on the ward) but will let you eat at the 'self' (the staff canteen) for a reduced price or 4 euros for a 3 course meal. All the staff and students eat there together.

Be prepared for this initial admin process to take an equal amount of time as it did for me, or even longer, as the Erasmus office is very prone to being 'fermé exceptionnellement'! However once all these things have been completed you are ready to start on your placement.

An intro to medical education in France

Anyone can start medical school in France, and there is a common first year called PACES which all healthcare students take. At the end of this year there is a large exam, and only the highest performers (~top 20%) are allowed to stay on the medical course. Amongst the ones who do not gain entry to medicine, they can either carry on another healthcare course such as nursing or physiotherapy, or retake the year and go for medicine again.

Their second year is spent at the faculty doing science and theory, then in their 3rd year they become an 'externe', and rotate between six weeks of placement and six weekend of lessons. When on placement they are paid by the hospital (starting at 100 euros a month) and handle many of the administrative tasks on the wards, as well as seeing incoming patients and then writing an 'observe'.

In 5th and 6th year they no longer have lessons and are permanently on placement in different specialties. They get paid about 200 euros a month in these years. At the end of the 6th year they take the national 'concours', and how they score in this exam depends on whether they can gain entry into their chosen specialty! From this they go directly into a specialty and become an intern.

As a result of the nature of their medical education system, French medical students are extremely competitive and very hard working. The students start preparing for the concours as early as late 4th year, and they pay good money to attend revision courses on weekends from 5th year onwards! If you want to do procedures/clerk patients on the wards you will sometimes have to put yourself forward quite forcefully, as they really do jump on any chance to get clinical/theoretical experience.

What to wear on the wards

You won't need your smart trousers and shoes in France. Doctors and medical students wear casual clothes but wear a white blouse or white coat over the top. You get your blouse/coat from the lingerie in the hospital you start at, after that just keep the one you were originally given and use it in the other hospitals you go to.

Placement 1 - Digestive and Transplant Surgery (Hôpital de la Croix Rousse)

My first placement in a French hospital was a daunting prospect as I had never done a French SSC before! French surgical firms start work at 7:30am so I arrived a bit earlier than that on my first day so as to locate the department and find someone on the team who would tell me what I was doing. One of the surgical interns gave me a quick intro to the department and pointed me in the direction of the other medical students, who were from 4th, 5th and 6th year. The department is overseen by a notoriously fearsome chef de service, who is also an incredible surgeon.

On Monday, Tuesday and Thursday mornings there was a lesson at 7:30 which would last an hour and usually be based around a case presentation made by one of the students. On the other mornings we would attend the ward rounds.

The general surgery department was divided into 4 wards and I was attached to transplant surgery. Croix Rousse is a major transplant centre, mostly dealing in renal and liver transplant but also in

pancreatic. There is a wide range of pathology on the ward at all times such as primary biliary cirrhosis, hepatitis and scleroderma and it is worth trying to read some of the patient dossiers.

Unless you are timetabled to go to a clinic, which will happen once or twice during your five weeks, you will be in theatre every day. In theatre you are often allowed to scrub in and assist with operations of varying length and technicality. I got to assist with small operations like putting in portacaths and abscess drainage, up to large and long operations like colectomies.

All theatre personnel wear masks at all times, so linguistically this was a very difficult first placement! It took me a couple of weeks to tune into what people were saying in theatre, and in this time I felt quite stupid on a few occasions, but don't be disheartened as this is natural and you do improve.

I was asked to give a case presentation and rather than blindly searching for a patient I located one of the interns I knew who suggested one to me. We discussed the patient and I put together a power point, which I presented at the next lesson. The other students and the intern gave me feedback on both my French and on the content of my presentation, and were all very positive and friendly. Even though it is difficult linguistically to integrate into this environment and you can feel a little slow at times, people are impressed that you are making the effort to speak their language and work in their country so don't let it get you down!

Overall this was a very challenging first placement, mainly due to the adjustment I was making into the French language but it was one I thoroughly enjoyed. I got chance to see a lot of interesting operations, including a liver transplant and met some really friendly students and interns who I had some nights out with! If you can deal with the early mornings and French mumbled into surgical masks, I would recommend this one.

Placement 2 - Cardiology (Louis Pradel Hospital)

Louis Pradel Hospital is over on the east side of Lyon in a big medical site home to a collection of specialty based hospitals. It took me about an hour to get across town to this site, taking two buses and a metro. I didn't call ahead for this placement, but just introduced myself to the team when I arrived and was told what to do by the cardiology interns.

Here I was assigned to a general and interventional cardiology ward. My role was assisting with the ward rounds, performing (lots of) ECGs, and clerking incoming patients. After my initial 5 week surgery placement my French was starting to improve and the transition into this block was much smoother.

The ward rounds in cardiology are long, but you will get chance to listen to lots of heart murmurs and lung crackles. The majority of patients on this ward have heart failure so it gives you a good opportunity to learn causes and management.

There was much more chance to talk to patients and other medical students on this placement, and this allowed my French to improve at a good rate. Although I got to clerk lots of patients during this rotation, it was also where I discovered the typical role of a French medical student, which is to be a good secretary. I made lots of phone calls, filled out lots of forms and tidied away lots of files! This can be quite tedious, but all I can advise is that if you are asked to do it just do your best and people will appreciate your effort.

Within the French medical system medical staff use brand names for medications, and this made it extremely difficult for me at first as we almost exclusively use the generic names for medications in the UK system. Don't worry though as you do start to pick up the names, and the interns will usually tell you the generic name if you ask. There was opportunity to go and see coronary

angiograms, ablations, and minimally invasive valve replacements so if you have any interest in this kind of thing it is worth going to see at least one or two.

Overall this was an interesting placement with nice staff and students, but I did feel a bit bogged down in admin at times!

Placement 3 - Functional Respiratory Investigations (Hopital de la Croix Rousse)

My final placement was based not in a clinical ward but in the unit responsible for performing spirometry, VO₂ and hypoxia testing, arterial blood gases, walking tests, sports medicine consultations, and cardio respiratory rehabilitation. I was slightly annoyed when I learned I had this placement, as I had requested respiratory medicine!

Patients are visiting this service for a wide variety of reasons. Some have chronic or new respiratory disease and are there for functional monitoring/confirmation of diagnosis. Some are having functional respiratory assessment prior to receiving a transplant. Some are post MI or chemo/radio therapy and need rehabilitation. Athletes come for VO₂ and hypoxia testing, and young tennis players come for musculoskeletal assessment.

This is a small unit, and even though I had not called ahead the chef de service knew I was coming and had my name and length of stay written up on the board. When I arrived the team were friendly and there was one 6th year student there who would be staying for another week then finishing his placement to prepare for the concours. After he left I would be the only med student. He gave me a rundown on the jobs I would be doing and what would be expected of me on this placement (which did not take long as the externe has two main jobs here).

My roles were to take arterial blood gases from patients who were coming in for respiratory assessment, and to instruct and supervise patients doing 6 minute walking tests. The ABGs are usually taken after the patients have done respiratory function assessment, and I usually did about 6 or 7 each day. This is done in a special room where there is a chair with armrests, a blood gas analyser, and all the ABG equipment. When you have taken the sample you analyse the sample there and then, and interpret the results. You then check and discuss this with the intern.

The walking tests involved instructing patients about the assessment, strapping a pulse and blood oximetry monitor onto them and supervising them walking in the corridor for 6 minutes (this gets old very quickly!). After they have walked you plug the monitor into the computer and prepare a report which shows the distance they walked, and all the details involving their saturations and heart rate.

Although these tasks were what I spent most of my time doing, there was also opportunity to attend the VO₂ and hypoxia consultations, but most interesting was the sports medicine consultations for young tennis players. Here you can view and learn a full detailed musculoskeletal examination performed on these young athletes, which identifies any weaknesses they have so that modifications can be made to their training regimes, and hopefully future injury can be avoided.

You will not routinely be asked to interpret spirometry results, but I made a point of asking as I wanted to try and develop my ability in this area. I came away much more confident at identifying obstructive/restrictive patterns. In terms of ABGs, I performed over 80 during this placement and became very competent at this performing the procedure and interpreting the results. This is something that will certainly benefit me in FY1 and beyond! I came across a wide range of pathology, but there was no chance for me to take histories or examine patients in this department so I do not think I learnt a huge amount of medicine here. As for the walking tests, I think I have done enough to last me a lifetime!

Overall, there were some positives to this placement as I did become proficient in some practical skills and see some good pathology, but it was really not varied or interesting enough to warrant a 5 week placement for Erasmus students.

Getting signed off at the end of placements

None of the doctors I worked with had heard of or been registered previously onto medlea. I suggest you locate a friendly doctor in each department very early on, explain what it is and that you will need your ESA form done, and then complete the form with them in advance of the end of your placement. Once you have submitted the form they will need to be validated by medlea before they can access it. If you can be with them to access the form, and see them validate it you will save yourself a lot of hassle and stress towards the end! Don't leave it until after the placement. Once you move hospital you may never be returning and tracking doctors down by email can be a nightmare!

The Lyon experience

Regardless of what placements you have, you will not be disappointed by the city of Lyon. It is a truly beautiful and vibrant city, which is almost unknown in the UK. The range of restaurants is amazing, from traditional Lyonnais bouchons to modern French haut cuisine. The bread, cheese, pastries and local Cotes de Rhone red wine (which is very cheap and so tasty!) are gorgeous.

The city itself is not too large but big enough to stay interesting, and there are so many areas to see and explore.

Socially, we developed a really close group of friends who were all Erasmus students from various countries there on medical stages. We met initially in the French lessons we signed up for before arrival (we didn't carry these on for too long as they were 3 hours long on a Wednesday night). Most of the Erasmus medics were doing a full semester, some a whole year. Amongst them were Italians, Czechs, Germans and Poles. Every weekend we were doing some sort of activity, whether it was nights out, picnics in the park or cycling down the banks of the Rhône on the velov's (Lyons Boris bikes).

The key is to make the most of the experience, outside and inside of the hospital! It does take a couple of weeks to settle in and adapt to the language, but overall I found the whole thing an awesome experience. Even though France is not far from the UK, being thrown into a foreign country where you are required to speak the language, work in their medical system, and make an entirely new group of friends is a truly challenging prospect. You do find that you can rise to this challenge though, and there is a great sense of achievement when it draws to a close!

Important contacts and info

Yves Langlois, Lyon Est Erasmus coordinator. Works afternoons, no Wednesdays.

Yves.langlois@univ-lyon1.fr

Mr. Langlois is based at the medical school in Grange Blanche. You get here by taking the green metro line.

www.tcl.fr Site for the Lyon transport network, gives you timings of buses, trams, metros and has a very good journey planner which will come in handy early on when you are unsure of where you're going. Download the iphone app too!