

Why I chose to do the European Option and what it involves

I chose to study European Option because I had always been good at languages at school. I did not choose Manchester because of it but when I arrived was so pleased that it was offered! I chose French because I have never learned Spanish and you have to do an interview in Spanish when you arrive to show your competency. In the first two years you have two separate hours a week timetabled in during the day in one of the language buildings on campus. In third year and fourth year you have an evening class of two hours. There is homework set and it is important to keep on top of this as it will help prepare you for the DALF exam at the end of fourth year. As well as the four month placement there is also the opportunity to do your SSC's in France or Switzerland - French speaking. I did one of my SSC's in Paris at a paediatric general practice. It was quite an experience! There was only one doctor on site at any one time - the GP who was supervising me swapped morning/afternoon with another GP. It was very different to anything that I have experienced at GP surgerys in the UK! It was very interesting to work in a paediatric GP - something that we do not have in UK. I really liked the fact that families living in the surrounding area had a named paediatric GP from birth who followed them through their lives until the age of 16. After this they will have to find an adult GP. There were a wide range of cases ranging from neonates with bronchiolitis to young girls and boys with anorexia. I did my SSC report on bronchiolitis. It was very interesting to do this to compare primary care in the UK and in France - and was good preparation for my final placement in Nantes.

Living and working in Nantes

I chose to go to Nantes because I didn't want to go to Paris - I have been to Paris many times before and wanted to go to a truly French city! Another thing that I would recommend thinking about is prices - Paris is incredibly expensive especially for accommodation - and it's nice to experience

somewhere where everyone speaks French to you! I also loved the fact that it was so relaxing and easy to get around! The layout of the city is incredible - everywhere feels so tranquil and calm because there are so many wide open spaces - it's busy but not too hectic. Nantes is a fantastic city to be a student in - there are lots of students that populate the city so you will meet lots of people. However the time of the placement is the same time that the 6th years in France are preparing for their concours - a big exam against every other 6th year medic in the country - they must pass this exam to graduate and essentially it decides where they will be able to get a job. So they won't really be around during the placement. However it is really easy to meet other erasmus students. I was very close with some students that were working at the radio! So it's a really nice experience in that sense to do something different in a new place.

Living in Nantes is fairly cheap, and you most likely will be somewhere near the centre - which is where the faculte and the hospital is. I stayed in Chantiers Navals which is an area two stops along the river from Commerce - it took less than 5 minutes to cycle into hospital every morning. I originally applied to stay in university accommodation. However, I would NOT recommend this. I turned up to the accommodation and it was terrible!! Very cheap - however it is about 10 minutes out of town on the bus - and this may not sound like a lot but Nantes is very small and it will be annoying to get back to once the buses stop - there is no tram link to where the halls are. The halls themselves are fairly depressing - very long dark corridors - and the rooms are very very small - you have your own en suite bathroom - and your own fridge in the room which buzzes! The bed was a tiny single bed with a plastic mattress. There was no Wi-Fi as far as I am aware - once you have subscribed to the university you can access the university Wi-Fi however there are heavy restrictions on what you can access - for example you can't use skype! I therefore decided that I would not want to stay there - it didn't seem like the most sociable place and I felt like I would have been miserable in the tiny little room - so I found somewhere else to stay. On Monday morning when I went to register at the

international office there were a few problems - the university was not very happy that I'd reserved a room and then refused it... so my advice regarding accommodation - don't accept the university room! It was ok in the end and I didn't have to pay anything but next time they may not be so accommodating... If you do decide to choose the university accommodation - it can't be sneered at because it is so cheap - there are no utensils or bedding provided. You can buy bedding at the accommodation for I think about 20 euros - with a duvet, sheet, pillow and pillow case. To get cutlery - the university recommended me to go to a big hypermarche which was about 20 minutes away on the bus - however there is a big new Carrefour in Commerce (the centre) where I am sure you will be able to get cutlery. If you don't decide to stay in the university Residence then you can easily find something on spare room. I used these websites while looking for my apartment:

www.chambrealouer.fr

www.spareroom.fr

www.leboncoin.fr

www.gumtree.com

<http://www.rssf.fr/>

This website is the link to Residence Services Simeon Foucault - I went to look around these rooms and was pretty set on staying there - they are furnished rooms in a layout similar to halls - however they are very nice! There are cleaners who clean the kitchen every day, the bills are included and there is free wifi and washing machine/tumble dryer use - you can also request that they change your sheets for fresh ones. The price is about €540 - however the lady who owns the halls who is very nice will help you with your CAF application! There are loads of other students there too - so a good chance to meet people too. And the

accommodation is about two minutes walk from the hospital too - so this is a nice change from being on placement in and around Manchester!

CAF - this is something that I didn't know about before - stands for Caisse Allocations Familiales. You are able to get about $\frac{1}{3}$ of your rent back in this way - which is really really worth it! As I mentioned at the Foucault residences the landlady will help you apply - French bureaucracy is a nightmare and it is difficult to do everything according to how they want you to apply for example the wording of letters - however another French student will be able to help you with this. I haven't yet received my CAF but am hoping to soon.
Website - www.caf.fr

Nantes is well connected by trams. You can buy a tram pass at the TAN office in Commerce - I didn't do this - the location where I was living didn't really justify buying a tram ticket. The only thing that I could have used the tram for was to go to the gym at Facultes (see below) however I much preferred to cycle - there is a really nice route along the river L'Erdre - this takes about 20 minutes also.

Website: www.tan.fr

There is a really good bike system - the same as the Boris bikes in London - with docking stations apparently every 200m - wherever you go you know that there will be somewhere to leave your bike. I would really recommend getting a bicloo card - you can pick one up at the TAN office in Commerce and link it to your contract which you can sort out online. It's only €29 for the whole year - well worth doing. If you have friends to come and stay you can take them out a bike online for just €1 for 24 hrs - however do NOT do this at the bike station machines as they will also take €150 as a deposit and then only pay it back a few weeks later.

Website: www.bicloo.fr

Airport - on arriving at the airport - you can pay €1.50 for a ticket (it lasts you an hour) - get the bus to Neustrie and then

take the tram into Commerce. You can get the airport bus all the way to Commerce however this costs €7.50 and takes basically the same amount of time and effort as taking the bus and then the tram.

Gym - you can join the gym at the university for only €25 euros for a whole year. With this you get three activities - I chose Musculation (as in the normal gym with treadmills etc...), African dance and Zumba! There are loads of things to choose from including volleyball... sailing... climbing... basketball and more. Again this is a really great way to meet people. The gym is located at Facultes - this is the main area where all of the other courses are based. It is about 20 minutes away from Commerce on the tram.

Website: https://www.univ-nantes.fr/34969603/0/fiche_pagelibre/&RH=SPOR

Bank - I opened an account with Societe Generale - you have to take with you identification, an attestation d'hebergement which your land lord will write, I can't remember what else but by this point you will have taken all of these documents with you to register with uni, get your caf sorted... etc - eventually I just took everything with me in one folder just in case that they need something that you have forgotten! French students have experience doing all of these things and will be a great help to help get you set up.

Phone number - I heard that the cheapest is 3 in France - however I couldn't find the store in Nantes so went with Orange - it was €30 for a month including internet - I have heard that 3 is only €20. It is useful having a phone for obvious reasons and using your english number will rack up huge bills so it is definitely worth doing. When you go into the store you need to have your passport with you.

What I have learnt on the placement in regard to any differences to UK hospitals and practice, the medical training programme and the contrasting medical issues

Differences to UK hospitals - in France the system for medical students is different.

Years 1+2 - medical students

Years 3-6 - externes

F1/F2 and beyond - internes

Registrar level - chef du clinique

Chief consultant - chef du service

Externes are paid €200 a month - however as an erasmus student I was not able to receive this! I know that in Paris the erasmus students also received this payment - it's not much but a bit of help. The externes have responsibilities in the hospital - such as clerking patients and doing jobs for the internes. This hands on approach is really good - you really feel involved with the ward and have importance instead of just shadowing. This does depend on the placement - my first gastro placement was like this but ophthalmology and ENT were more based on shadowing internes and sitting in on consultations/theatre. In theatre you are always allowed to scrub up and assist a great deal with the operation - I did lots of suturing. I also spoke to a student who spent a night in A+E suturing wounds - something that I didn't do but could be worth asking about if you are interested in this.

Placements - I chose ophthalmology and ENT because we don't have a great deal of teaching on these subjects so I thought it would be interesting. I had to choose four out of a selection of five so there wasn't much leeway for choosing. However I really enjoyed all my placements and would recommend urology (my last placement) with Professor Bourchot if you are keen on early starts - you start at 7:45 so its not a very relaxed placement but you can learn a lot and do lots of toucher rectals etc...!

What I have gained

- **Linguistically**

At first I was slightly overwhelmed at the hospital - it is a bit scary going in for the first time but you really feel like part of

the team straight away! And my French picked up so quickly - after a week I could understand everything anyone was saying and it continued to improve throughout the placement which I was really pleased about. You are speaking French all the time at your placement and with friends - however it's quite easy to meet English-speaking erasmus students... my housemate was from Mauritius and spoke French and English fluently - this was really useful as we mostly spoke in French and she could correct me quickly! I especially liked picking up expressions and slang words - to speak French more like a local. I even saved them onto my phone when I heard them! Qui va a la chasse perd sa place!

- **Inter-cultural understanding**

Living in a French town gives you a really good idea about local culture - it is really fascinating to explore a bit around the town and there are lots of things to see in Nantes. There is a castle... a cathedral (Place du Foche)... an exhibition/restaurant/bar space that reminded me of the Barbican a little bit... I went to see a play there called Ganesh and the 3rd Reich, they do swing nights, an art exhibition was on in the back room was on for the whole time I was there... the building is really cool - it's called Lieu Unique and used to be an LU biscuit factory! In addition to this the Ile de Nantes is a really good place to hang out - there is a lot of open space and a fake beach which is really nice to sit when it's sunny - right by the river. There is a museum which is based on the works of Jules Verne including a giant elephant that walks around the museum - it really is huge! I didn't actually go on the elephant as I think it's more spectacular to look at rather than ride on but that's just my opinion. Nearby is a stretch of bars - Hangar a Bananes - which is a good place to go out as you can just hop between the bars and it's all free entry - and it all stays open late. It's also a really nice place to sit in the early evening as it's in the right place for the sunset. There are lots of good things that they put on like Brazilian night at the Australian bar where you can eat tapioca etc... There is also a park that I would recommend going to called Jardin des plantes - it is sort of an Alice in Wonderland themed park with

giant benches - and a goat emporium where you can play with the goats...

Even just hanging around with French students you can experience cultural differences - even if it's just what they do when they go out. French students are really keen to learn English too and even more keen to help you with your French. Not very many French students speak English in my opinion - some speak very good English but some not very good at all - so it is nice to help them with this a little bit.

French bureaucracy is a cultural difference that you will have to get used to - to do anything - open a bank account... insurance etc... is a nightmare.

- **Ideas and future plans**

My placement in France has shown me that it is possible for me to work in another French-speaking country - something that opens up a lot of opportunities in my future. My placement in Madagascar was also really useful - I'd love to work and help in a developing country for a period of my life so again this confirmed to me that I can do it! It is a shame that my French will probably get worse now that I am not practicing it every day - however I am already keeping up with French news and will try and read French books as often as I can. Having the European Option on our degree - even though it doesn't count for any EPM points annoyingly - is something that not a lot of other students will have - and will be really useful in interviews and portfolio to demonstrate time management skills, learning from outside medicine and so on. And obviously if you want to work in France or a French-speaking country it is perfect experience to confirm whether you really want to do this. Four months is a long time to live in another country - so if you are planning on upping and leaving at some point in later life it is really good to have experienced something like this before you move your entire life and then realise that it's not for you.

Places that I'd advise going to!

Restaurants:

Chez Maman has amazing food and a really cool interior - fairly expensive but possibly somewhere to take your parents.

Entrecote - this is a restaurant where the only thing you can order is steak - no vegetarians allowed - and all you can eat chips. The steak is really good - to eat is about €20 - the chips aren't amazing but they are all you can eat.

Le Coq en Pate – I loved this restaurant because its real French style food for quite cheap and a really French feel to it.

La Cigale – this is the oldest brasserie from la belle époque in Nantes and has an amazing interior – however slightly more expensive and the foods not as good as le Coq en Pate.

Bars:

Le Chat Noir – this is a bar in Commerce that I went to a lot and would recommend – very busy in the evening and sometimes bands play.

Le Lieu Unique – really nice to sit at in the evening if its warm – they have deckchairs outside.

Hangar a Bananes – lots of nice bars down here – really nice to sit at when its sunny or at sundown!

Places to visit:

Pornic – for the beach – get here on the train.

Sables d'Oronne – another beach closeby – get here on the train too – town is really nice – lots of Parisians come here on holiday – I thought the beach was a bit touristy but nice enough. Very good sea food too.

Cathedral/Place du Foche – really nice part of Nantes – as I mentioned before there are lots of big open spaces and this is a nice place to walk around.

Castle – there are museums in the castle and temporary art exhibitions – and also nice to sit in the gardens when its sunny.

Trentemoult – you can go here with a tram ticket from Gare Maritime – takes two minutes to cross the river...colourful little town even just for a coffee.

Jardin des Plantes – Alice in Wonderland themed gardens – really really nice! You can't sit on the lawn though but there is a café and a goat enclosure where you can pick up the goats.

Elephant – and also the museum which is all about Jules Verne. You can also ride the elephant and there is a Jules Verne themed merry-go-round also.

Fake beach in Nantes – near the elephant... wooden sun loungers here and very nice place to sit when it's sunny.

Festivals – there are loads of free festivals that start towards the beginning of summer which definitely need to be taken advantage of – there is one called BPM which is on the far end of Ile de Nantes in CRAPA (a park), another free festival I went to called festival de l'ere... the clubs in Nantes in my opinion are all a bit like Tiger Tiger and not that great so you need to keep an eye on events coming to Nantes – Mungo's Hi-Fi played at Stereolux while I was there and there are lots of cool bands to look out for!!

Paris – only 2 hrs away on the train so always a good place to go for the weekend!