

# **European Option Report**

## **Lausanne 2015**



## Why I chose European Studies

I found out about European studies while I was doing my A levels, and instantly wanted to improve my chances of being able to work abroad. As I started medicine, I had ideas of working for MSF or moving abroad with my French and medicine. During my 4<sup>th</sup> year project, my supervisor commented on how useful it would be to speak a European language, when collaborating with other researchers. Despite all this, I found motivating myself to always commit to the French on top of the medical work harder than I anticipated. However, having now got to Lausanne and being able to practice my French each day, it is motivating me once again to improve my French, though what I use it for in the future I am still unsure. I am also always keen to break the stereotype that the English are not good at other languages!

## Why I chose Lausanne

I chose Lausanne for a few reasons. Partly as I have visited many parts of France on holiday, and done an SSC at Perpignan hospital, so felt like visiting somewhere a bit different. I wanted to be able to work in another different healthcare system so I can compare the three. I was also aware that my French was not the best, and thought Lausanne may have more English speakers if I was really struggling, and possibly that the people would be a bit more patient.

## Language

I found the language hard, especially as there were so many different accents in Lausanne. However, over 4 months I definitely think my French has improved, though perhaps not as much as if I was living in France as so many people do also speak English. I would also say that this is a perfect placement for anyone who can speak or wants to learn other languages, as there are so many international and European students and doctors. I have really enjoyed picking up a smattering of German, Italian and Spanish.

## Life in Lausanne

Lausanne is a beautiful city, though very hilly and cold when you first arrive! The public transport is well integrated, though it took me a while to get to grips with it.

**Shopping** – there are plenty of supermarkets around. I went to Migros in Flon fairly often for food, and also Coop in Bessieres and Sallaz. There are also Coops in the gare and at Ouchy which are open on Sunday, unlike the other supermarkets. The hardest part is getting used to the opening times, closing at 7 pm weekdays, and 6pm on Saturday. There is also a market on Saturday morning at Riponne, which sells a variety of fresh food and other things.

**Expense** – Switzerland is expensive, especially all the admin, but you soon get used to it, and I felt that I did alright on the money, as you also receive quite a bit too. The university will give you a bursary of 1440fr (in lieu of no longer getting the Erasmus grant) and CHUV will give you 733fr/month. The travel card



also saved me a lot of money on public transport during the week, and for 2 zones (which covers all of Lausanne and getting to and from the university) it is 51fr/month. If you anticipate using the train further afield and/or going skiing often, it may be worth getting a half-price card. I also decided to have my main meal at lunchtime in the canteen, which is 8.30fr.

I chose to only have a 7 month contract with another European Option student in Manchester, for earlier in the year, and not paying for accommodation in the UK as well is a massive bonus.

### Things to do in Lausanne

Lausanne is a beautiful place, with lots of things to do. The town itself, though not big, is beautiful and packed with culture. There are loads of art galleries and museums to see if you have a spare afternoon or weekend. The Olympic museum I would definitely recommend. Lac Léman is beautiful, and quickly became one of my favourite places to spend a Sunday afternoon.

The xchange society is very keen to organise things, such as curling, opera, international buffet, nights out, boat parties etc. They also organise day trips and weekend trips to other parts of Switzerland such as Tichino, which was a brilliant trip! However, tickets go really quickly and can sometimes be tricky to get if they are not selling them at CHUV as well. They also organise a Cultural Café on Tuesdays, which are great for meeting new people and learning about different countries and cultures.

The medical society also organises some events, in particular the 'bal de medecine' was a great party, held in an ice-rink with 3000 tickets sold.

The university also offers a variety of activities. There are loads of different sports you can join, though most require paying an upfront joining fee, but there are also free exercise classes available. You can also go to the UNIL theatre for free if you book online in advance, and there are sometimes concerts on as well. The university also offers free French lessons, at CHUV. They are good for meeting other exchange medical students, and the lessons can be fun.

Nightlife in Lausanne can be expensive unless you go on the xchange nights. Bars that I particularly liked the Great Escape in Riponne and Bourg Plage when the weather is nicer. Mad club is the biggest in Lasuagne, but the music is mixed.

### Visiting Switzerland

As mentioned above the xchange society organises quite a lot of visits to different parts of Switzerland, but I tended to go with friends instead.

- Gruyere is a pretty little town with an interesting castle and cheese factory. You can also try lots of different cheese dishes. La Maison Cailler is also not far, and definitely worth a visit, at the end of the tour you can eat as much chocolate as you like.
- Nyon is town along Lac Léman, which has the same charm as Ouchy. There are some Roman ruins which are interesting and also Chateau de Prangins is not far, which is a Swiss culture museum.

- Montreux and Vevey are also cute towns along the lake. Montreux is especially beautiful and sometimes has things going on, on the weekends. The chateau de Chillon is also only a 40 minute walk along the lake.
- Cully Jazz festival is on during the four months and is a good evening out.
- Geneva is an interesting though much less attractive place. You can buy city audio-tours from the tourist office. The museum de Croix rouge was worth a visit.
- Ticino (the Italian part) was stunning. Lugano is the largest city, and reminiscent of Nice, but with a lake instead of the sea. Bellinzona was a UNESCO world heritage site and very interesting, but my favourite city was Lacarno, which had a pretty charm.
- Bern, the capital of Switzerland was a lovely little city, though small. There are tours from the tourist office, which are interesting, and the clock is worth seeing. Unfortunately the bears (across the river) were not in Bern when I went.
- Le luge at Les Diablerets. This was loads of fun. We visited the chateau d'Aigle on the same day, which was more of a wine museum.
- I am not into skiing, though I am assured by many people that there are lots of great places to ski, if that is what you want to do. It is so much the local culture, I feel as if I frequently have nothing to add when the topic turns to skiing.



## Hospital and Placements (Stages)

I probably thought too much about other people's experiences of the different placements. I would say that when you are choosing, do not worry too much about other's experiences and choose whatever you want, as the experience will be completely different anyway, depending on who you work with and your level of French.

**Paediatric surgery** – I chose paediatric surgery as I really enjoyed doing paediatrics in year 4 and wanted to see some more. However, I spent the majority of the 4 weeks doing paediatric orthopaedics. I spent much of my time sitting and watching, especially in the operating theatre. I helped out a couple of times during an operation, though this depended a lot on the surgeon and also if s/he had a junior doctor (médecin assistant) to help out or not. One surgeon informed me that she felt my French was not good enough to help out during surgery, which though I understand, was also very frustrating. However, the other (swiss) stagiaire did not help out that much more than I did.

In the operating theatre I saw a lot of different operations that I have not seen before, especially arthroscopies, and learnt about new syndromes. I also saw a lot on the management of different fractures, and it was great practice for xray interpretation. However, they expected relatively little from me, and I rarely felt much needed by the team. They did not often ask me questions or taught me about what was going on, and when they did they were either anatomy questions or to check my understanding. Initially this was a relaxing start to my time Lausanne after exempting exams; however, by the end of the first 2 weeks it became more irritating.

Sitting in on consultations was preferable, as I felt I learnt more, both French and medicine than I did in the operating theatre. I also found it easier to ask questions, and saw different pathologies and orthopaedic examinations. The video-conference meetings were presentations from different paediatricians at the different local hospitals. The topics varied, and wasn't just orthopaedics, though there was a lot of histology. There was also time during the afternoons to do work in the medecins assistants office. This was particularly useful for me, as I had portfolio to catch up on!

I usually finished between 5.30 and 6pm after the colloque. The days are much longer than in the UK, but also more relaxed. Fridays were l'apéro vendredi, so someone from the team would bring in wine, bread and cheese for the team to share at 5pm to celebrate the start of the weekend.

## **Alcoologie**

This placement was split across 2 sites, first in Prilly (easily accessible by public transport) and then at CHUV. The placement at Prilly was for alcohol abstinence. There were opportunities to talk to the patients and all received a complete cardio, respiratory, gastro and neuro examinations when admitted. The placement was relaxed but there were still things to do and I was invited to take part in all the intervention sessions' aswell.

There was less I could do at CHUV. The morning was spent visiting patients with alcohol problems in the rest of the hospital, especially in A&E. This meant sometimes there would be no work or lots of work in the morning. The afternoon was appointments with patients, in various stages of alcohol use, between being forced to go by relatives and having successfully abstained for months. I sometimes found the French could be hard to follow, as the language was colloquial and often different accents, and the consultations were each an hour long. However, the patients were generally nice and let me talk to them or examine them. I also learnt a lot about motivational interviewing, especially for alcohol dependance and I think it is a really good way at changing behaviours. It is definitely something I would be interested in learning more about, and has hopefully improved my communication skills. I usually finished around 5pm, sometimes earlier if there were no patients.

## **Pathologie**

I really enjoyed doing the autopsies as I could take part in them and cut open and examine different organs. I also enjoyed the macroscopy after the autopsy, for the same reason. However, histology I found hard and did not particularly enjoy, and nearly every afternoon was either MDT meetings or histology. However, the team were very kind and welcoming and frequently explained things to me. I also felt very included, and joined them for lunch and celebrations. However, doing 2 blocks there was definitely too long for me! The placement was again very relaxed, and I was told that I was allowed 2 days of holiday (and I never worked weekends) so this was really great for long weekends away. I typically finished between 4 and

5pm in the afternoon depending on the work, occasionally 6.30pm if there was a late MDT meeting or autopsy.

## Practical Points

**Paperwork** - Once you have decided you want to go to Lausanne, they will send you lots of forms to fill in and get signed and then return. I would keep a list of what you have and haven't done, and what you need to do when you arrive, as it gets very confusing fast! You will also need to choose the stages (placements) you want to do. When I was choosing, there was mostly the less mainstream placements left as the Swiss students get first choice (hence my unusual mix). I also read a lot of different people's experience of the different stages. I have to say, none of mine particularly turned out to be what I expected, so I wouldn't worry too much about what others have said, and just choose whatever you fancy doing. You will be sent contracts to sign and send back.

**Erasmus** – Switzerland no longer qualifies for Erasmus funding, so the university offers a 1440fr bursary instead. Make sure you keep hold of the form when it is emailed to you!

**Accommodation** – I was contacted by Maria Velasco, end of October, about applying for accommodation with FMEL. The accommodation is essentially halls of residence, though there are students there from many different years as accommodation in Lausanne is so expensive. I asked to go to Falaises as it is opposite to the hospital. Obviously this means you will meet lots of medical students there, but also a lot of exchange students, particularly those studying at EPFL (the science university).

Maria offered to sort out my application form if you committed to it in October. The contract required a 1200 fr deposit, and the accommodation is 600fr per month, which is pretty reasonable. The downside is that you don't know your exempting exam results before you commit. An alternative is that you can apply for hospital accommodation, though the application form comes about 2 weeks before you leave, so when you are doing your exempting exams. From what I have heard, it is hard finding other accommodation unless you have a lot of money to spend.

## Before leaving –

1. Contact the concierge of the place you are staying in (especially if you are with FMEL) to organise picking up keys.
2. Sign-up for the French lessons (you will be sent an email).
3. Email the department you are starting in, to tell them when you are starting, and see if they want you to come in before your start date (paediatric surgery wanted me to collect my white coat and card, and gave me a tour of the hospital).
4. Make sure you have all the documents you need, including: attestation from the university, placements contract, copies of your bank statements, a couple of forms of identity, European health insurance card, several passport sized photos of yourself, a copy of the bursary application form, B2/C1 certificate.

**Arrival** - I decided to take the advice of previous student reports and fly out Switzerland on the Wednesday. I did wonder if it was the right decision, especially when I found out I would have to get separate accommodation for the first couple of days (as I couldn't move into FMEL until 1st February), however, after that I was really glad. I spent 2 days running around town trying to get things sorted, as everything closes on the weekend, and during lunchtime. Things to sort:

1. Visit your first department (and know where it is! As I was caught out, paediatric surgery is not at the main CHUV site).
2. Apply for a residence permit. Go to '**Bureau des etrangeres**' at the Contrôle des habitants. There, fill in the right form for you (European or International) to apply for your residence permit. You will need your attestation, ID and proof that you can afford to live in Switzerland (I used copies of my bank statements for this). My residence permit cost 95fr, and I asked for an attestation from them as well, which was another 20fr. If you show you university bursary letter however, it should only cost you 30fr.
3. Open a Swiss bank account. You will need this to collect your bursary from the university and pay from the hospital. You will need either a residence permit or an attestation from the bureau des etrangeres to be able to open one, as well as ID and your attestation from the university. It took me several attempts to have all the right documents to apply! I found the lady at the BCV bank at the university the most helpful, but she only works there in the afternoons. I paid 34 fr to open a bank account which was the cheapest they offered for a short term account. Some of my friends opened an account with the post office, and then had a lot of problems with them closing the account unexpectedly. A bonus with BCV was also that there was a bank at the hospital.
4. Go to the '**l'office vaudois de l'assurance maladie**' on the Ch. de Mornex 40. They just took a copy of my European Health Insurance card and my university attestation. It may be easier to just email them it instead (I think others did this in the past).
5. I also visited the medical school personnel at the hospital, this felt somewhat pointless as I didn't really do anything though I think you are asked to go in.
6. Consider buying a travel card from the office in Flon.
7. Fill in the paperwork for the university bursary and collect your student card. There is no rush on this, you have until the end of February, but the '**Service des Affaires socio-culturelles**' at the university is only open between 10-2pm.
8. Pick up keys for accommodation. You can either pick them up in person from the start of your contract between 7am and 4pm, Monday-Friday. Or ask for them to be left in a safe outside. The concierge likes to have a meeting with you as well, which is essentially showing you around, how things work and answering any questions.

**First day** – You will be sent a letter from human resources about a meeting at 7.30am on your first day. I tried to have the meeting the previous week, but the right person was not in, so when you visit your first department explain in advance that you will be late. At the meeting you will be given your badge, told how to get a white coat, your computer username and password and also several documents to be signed by your supervisors to enable you to be paid. Take along your Swiss bank details so they can set up the bank transfer. My understanding is that they



won't transfer to money to an English account. However, you can haggle about being paid in cash (they are reluctant). After that, most admin will be sorted.

**Welcome afternoon** – the university puts on a welcome afternoon with a free lunch, presentations, campus tour and you can collect things like your student card there as well. My supervisor was fine for me to take the time off to go, and I would definitely say it is worth it, as you get to meet a lot of other exchange students, and hear about the university and Xchange society. I also decided to buy the ESN xchange card for 10fr, which give you good discounts on all their socials. Afterwards, there was drinks in town which was good fun, and a chance to meet other people.

**Leaving** – Unsurprisingly there is loads of paperwork to sort out when leaving as well.

- FMEL ask for at least 2 months notice of leaving date, which can be done by email. Make sure you fill in your bank details to receive the deposit.
- You need to go back to the '**Bureau des etrangeres**' and complete the paperwork to leave.
- Clean and empty your room for inspection, key return and sign off paperwork, this has to be done on a weekday.
- Close your bank account, this needs to be started a week before hand, as if you want to take any remaining money back to England in cash, they have to keep your card for 3 days (alternatively you can have it transferred which costs 25fr).
- Go to the laundry and return the whitecoat. Then go to HR with card, laundry card, and payment form. Ask to pick up last salary in cash. Cash desk is by the florist, to the left of the main entrance.

## **Ideas and Future Plans**

Having finished 2 months in pathology and now facing FY1, my medical skills are feeling a little rusty! However, I am hoping they will soon come back. I really enjoyed my placement abroad and would do it all over again if I could. My future plans do not go much further than FY2 at the moment, but having spent 4 months working in a different country has definitely made me want to think about work abroad again.