

The European Option was actually a very strong reason for me to pick University of Manchester for medical school (albeit without knowing the full gist of what we would be able to do as a result); it was really important for me to carry on French, and was pleasantly surprised that this course existed!

In 3rd and 4th year I benefited from completing SSCs abroad: along with a couple very good friends, I went to Paris to be on an Infectious Diseases ward during the summer of 3rd year; and then for a very different experience in a small village in South-West France at a GP (a very refreshing before kicking on with Project Option) around Easter of 4th year, which are opportunities not really on offer elsewhere. Whilst great experiences in their own right, especially as you get to pick the placements, they were useful tasters for the bureaucratic, stamp-and-paper-loving healthcare system we would be introduced to in Lyon, and the general expectations of what a French medical student (*externe*) does.

Lyon

Living in Lyon for 4 months was really amazing: you arrive in the height of winter, very cold, but by the time you leave you've had some lovely sunny weeks to take advantage of, and the city is really well laid out to do so. The size of the city means that, whilst there are still varied and distinct sections to the city e.g Croix-Roussée, Vieux Lyon, Hotel de Ville, depending on your mood, it is also small enough to be able to walk around a lot of the time and get your bearings. When the weather permits, an extremely popular thing is to head to the Quay along the River Rhone and grab some drinks on one of the *péniches* (barge boats) that line the quay, or stroll along the cycle and pedestrian paths to the beautiful Parc de Tête d'Or. The park is massive, it's got amazing open spaces which frame a river in the middle, as well as a field for deer, a proper zoo, some botanic garden-things amongst a lot more; and a very pleasant place to head to for a run. Wandering around Vieux Lyon and visiting the *traboules* (these internal corridors between buildings that were originally used for silk merchants), getting engrossed in the cafe culture, walking up to Fourvière or Croix-Roussée, visiting museums, or just enjoying the open space and sights of Lyon, are just a few ways to happily pass time. The night-life is varied, e.g clubs around Hotel de Ville, bars in pretty much every district, or head to Le Sucre or Trambordieu techno/electro nights. *Nuit Sonores* is an electro music festival that takes place all over Lyon at the end of placement.

In winter you're able to take advantage of the fact that skiing/snowboarding/just going for a walk in the Alps is so easy to arrange: companies like Ski Mania or SkiSki organise day trips throughout the season that often guarantee about 8h of skiing/day for around €35-40 (for ski pass and transport). We heard about it a bit too late but if you get to know exchange students/normal students from Lyon 2 and Lyon 3 (medicine is part of Lyon 1, these different "uni's" are split according to subject matter really) they organise incredibly cheap weekends away to sign up to. I hadn't skied a lot before coming to Lyon, we had friends come out for weekends who had never skied before and would just pop over for the day, nice and casual. Lessons can be organised, and it really is an opportunity for all levels.

A lot of us would spend weekends away from Lyon, it is really well placed for other (especially Southern) parts of France and even other parts of Europe. We had long weekends away to Annecy (a beautiful Alpine town with a huge lake, and various hikes (not walks) that can be done); also

Avignon is a short train ride away; and Marseille a couple hours. A few of us also went to a ski festival called Worldwide in a Swiss town called Leysin. [ouigo.fr](https://www.ouigo.fr) is a cheaper train service that takes you to certain destinations, other cheaper options to explore Europe include buses to Turin, Barcelona, and beyond, and blablacar the carpooling website is an extremely popular mode of transport in France as can be significantly cheaper than train.

A few of us bought the Carte Jeune railcard, especially if you think you'll be travelling back in France within the year: it's a year pass for €50 that grants you about 40% off train travel - train fares are more expensive in France than I thought they would be. It also helps your wallet if you're an organised person, and like to plan your weekends many weeks in advance as that's how you get the cheap tickets (3 months seems the way to go!). I was only ever that organised when arriving in Lyon: the train ticket from Paris-Lyon was £20, and hikes up incredibly if you leave it too late (in which place flock to [ouigo.fr](https://www.ouigo.fr)).

But aside from getting away, spending time in Lyon is really fun, and it is a really accessible city which I am sure other reporters have written about far better than me! Whether it's to do with the layout of the city as well, it's split in 3 by 2 parallel rivers running through, it has a relaxed and friendly vibe, full of students and with a strong Erasmus component.

Finding where to live

Things to decide for where to live: do you go for the student accommodation, which (according to other Erasmus folk) though the cheapest option by far is really basic, you're sharing the kitchen and bathroom facilities with a corridor of people and, depending where has availability, are not very well placed; or onto private accommodation. I probably didn't go about this the best way: personally I sorted a contracted for a flatshare (sous-location) in the midst of Finals revision; if you want to take student accommodation this is also a choice you have to make by mid January or so. It can be quite stressful trying to find somewhere to live in the run up to exams, on top of that you do get sent quite complicated forms from the Lyon admin team to deal with that can involve a lot of to-ing and fro-ing from the Manchester Erasmus department, and an online language assessment that needs to be completed in the run up to OSCEs in order to be eligible for the Erasmus grant. So be prepared!

I was really happy in the end to have done a sous-location (found online, there are websites like leboncoin, or [appartager.com](https://www.appartager.com)) as it meant I continued to speak a lot of French outside of hospitals, and got to meet new people, some of whom have become really good friends. Also this sounds a bit weird, making "French" friends, as opposed to the army of friendly and sociable Erasmus group, is more difficult than you might imagine as their course is so competitive and from 5th year they have to work really hard; in this sense a flat-share is great. However you're obviously not in control of who you live with, it can feel a bit like going back to 1st/2nd year of uni and I didn't really appreciate before coming out that you may well not all get along amazingly. Also you don't know the area before coming out (again thankfully it all turned out well) and I overpaid for my apartment. I lived right by Guillotiere metro stop which isn't the nicest district but is a great transport hub for anywhere in the city; getting to hospital would never take that long and it's right by the Quay.

Therefore an option some EO students take is to find somewhere shorter-term on airbnb, there are often weekly/monthly rent rates; and that way there is no hassle for a deposit and all the unknown

extra french insurance charges that get added on at a time when you want to be concentrating on Finals. Another point about sorting a houseshare is that they may require 3 month's rent (!!!) up front if you can't supply a French guarantor; painful, and it also basically locks you in to a contract for the full length of time.

Then there is the COMPLETELY illusive CAF process that some lucky few may receive within their lifetime if you go for the professional sous-location (you're not entitled to it with airbnb etc). This is basically a monthly grant that the State give to students with no employment to help fund their living arrangements, and we can be entitled to that as well. I'm still waiting for mine though having left Lyon, and begun the process back in March. Therefore I wouldn't rely on it as a means to justify finding an apartment that is otherwise too expensive as it takes so long to come in. The process is a bit of a nightmare, you need to open a french bank account and fill out the online forms (<http://www.caf.fr>), backed up by various pieces of evidence and generally involves lots of trips to the CAF office (don't go on Thursday, they seem to have many "jour fermé exceptionnel" on Thursdays. Just get it started asap.

Extracurricular opportunities

I took up a couple sports in Lyon; I was set on trying at least one for the experience (if only as a way to justify getting stuck into the French cuisine) and had missed playing in a team once Finals revision took over. There wasn't much guidance on how to go about joining sports teams; I've put a website link at the bottom that shows what is on offer and when they run. There are two classes of activity: 'perfectionnement' which means a social level, or 'competition' whereby you pay a €20 fee, get yourself a medical certificate (an interne on my ward wrote me one) to say you can play and then you do matches as well as training. I took up basketball, as netball is my main sport but no one in France has ever heard of it (and are none the wiser after my many attempts to explain). Having never played it before, I wanted to do the social training but that was full, so I ended up joining the team and playing some matches, which though quite daunting at first I was actually really happy to have done, and it's of course a way to make new friends. They were all very patient with letting me get to grips with the vocal and explaining drills in more detail to me as you keep hearing words that you've never come across before. So it can be done!

What a couple of us realised very late was that being an Erasmus student can get you onto any 'Perfectionnement' activity, even if you want to start turning up late on in the semester, for free. So we started indoor rock climbing a month before the term finished, it's a big sport here; as well as this there is yoga, swimming, football, fencing, lots of things available. Again, you meet new people and very fun ways to pass an evening - I'd never done rock climbing before.

I would recommend the French classes; we join the group a bit later as other Erasmus lot are completing a longer period of time in Lyon, on so there aren't that many to get through, If you can put up with a 3h leasson/week it's a good way to make new friends from all over Europe and Solange is a lovely teacher, who puts up with the fact that we are not the sot motivated of classes.

Comments on life as a medical student in France

I think we've lucked out as medical students in Manchester compared to France. Studying here seems incredibly competitive and at times very archaic. They start clinical years from 3rd year; in Lyon the course is split between 6 weeks straight of placement, then 6 weeks of lessons, which

more likely than not are not linked up; and then just placement for 5th and 6th year. I had students on placement for specialities they had never studied, and you get allocated placement choices according to exam results. As a student in clinical years (externe) they sign a contract with the teaching hospital which means, unlike in Manchester, you don't have the right to organise how you spend your time: if it is really quiet and nothing to do, you have to wait on the ward until they say you can leave at the end of the day, which can be 6pm+. They have to fill out forms in advance if they want time off and get them signed off with the lead doctor and secretary. There isn't a library/ common room in the hospital you can go to for a bit and go back later. Saying that, there's a nice sense of camaraderie with fellow students in being stuck on placements like this, and the older students will naturally teach the younger students a lot (I find their level of theoretical knowledge is very high). After a couple weeks you get used to what your routine involves and accept you'll be there all day, and your French really does improve as a result. Other placements are half-days, or there are so many students involved that you have set timetables and lots of time off; there seems to be no rule to which is which (mine were not short days so read other reports to find some!).

You will have a lot of people asking how the system works in the UK, especially over the team lunches at the canteen which I think are a brilliant part of French culture (I've never before thought so highly of lunch); at least you get to perfect your answer each time. Anyone wanting to study a health-related specialty in France (e.g physio, SALT, nursing, doctor, midwifery) have the same 1st year at university; it sounds incredibly old-fashioned. They are put through a rigorous year of learning sciences (including Physics) to sit the Concours at the end of the year. About 10% people pass it well enough to be accepted into medicine; for the rest they either wanted to study the slightly less competitive other options, or then have to choose it, or retake the whole year to try again, or leave uni and try something completely different.

At the end of May in 6th year, the whole country sit the same exam that will rank every student: this exam is incredibly important as it basically decides the rest of their career. They have to pick their specialty at the same time as starting internship, in this sense the Final exam decides what career and where they will live. As such students start revising for it really early on, and pay money to attend weekend and evening classes to help ensure success. To me, the internes in their first year seem of a superior level that the FY1s in the UK and their knowledge-base is really impressive; they make relatively senior decisions about discharge planning, change in treatment and are left to run the ward a lot of the time on their own; with senior doctors coming to check a couple times/day. Cannulas, bloods, etc are all carried out by nurses, and the teams generally keep very separate.

Placement 1 - U40 Louis Pradel, Paediatric Cardiology

So this was quite a "stand in the corner and wait to be talked to" type of placement. It is what I had experienced in Paris during my SSC so it was only when my next ones were significantly better that I realised it wasn't always like this. Despite this, it is actually a really interesting placement: it's a very specialist ward for neonates, infants and adults with congenital heart defects, and as such you see a lot of babies with Chromosomal disorders you've only ever read about, get used to recognising the different heart defects by auscultation and get to grips slightly with what surgery is required. There are opportunities to watch procedures like angiograms and cardioversion. It's also a varied placement, between the 5 weeks I spent time on the neonatal unit, the creche and then on the adults section. I wasn't confident clerking during my time there as it was the first one, and quite complex, so for me this was mainly shadowing, attending ward rounds, doing simple admin tasks ,

doing **lots** of ECGs and watching **lots** of Echo's. I didn't get much teaching on this placement, the doctors were nice enough but they rarely would volunteer much information, for example when watching the Echo screen and wondering slightly what you were looking at! Time spent on the adults' section was better and could be more independent, but they were generally long days as the clerking gets started some time after lunch.

Placement 2 - U14 GHE, Endocrinology (Aile A1 Federation Endocrinologie)

This was a day hospital (avoid the week hospital if you can which is just diabetes), and as such an incredibly useful placement for practicing French. Day cases come either for a yearly check-up and review of medication, or because they have been referred in by other healthcare professionals for symptoms. Each day was also themed around certain conditions which would be the majority of patients for that day, for example Grave's Disease, pituitary pathologies especially acromegaly and prolactinomas, diabetes, gestational diabetes; clinics would take place in the afternoon for some of those patients. As such you can rotate between the students who concentrates on a certain pathology and goes to the clinic (e.g for the Grave's patients you present the cases to the neuro-ophthalmology clinic in the afternoon). The patients changed everyday, and all needed clerking in the morning before being reviewed and managed by a senior doctor, so I got to clerk 1-2 per morning (depending on my speed). The team was incredibly friendly - students, nurses and doctors of all levels, and I got to know everyone well. The days are long as a result but they passed very quickly, and I learnt a lot on this placement. I was with 3 other students, we worked closely together and got on really well. If you're happy to spend full days at hospital I thoroughly recommend this placement; you practice clerking and examinations a lot, the pathologies are really varied and you get 1:1 attention by a senior doctor in the afternoons when they come to review their patients; you also get familiar with insulin regimes (the one time when drugs being in brand names isn't such an issue). You're allowed quite a bit of independence once the intern decides you can be left to see your patients allocated before the senior doctors head over, e.g checking through their investigation results and decide what you think is appropriate to include in their clerking. It didn't feel at all as hierarchical as other placements. You get a week of consultations as well which is generally half days, and there is teaching one morning/week.

Placement 3 - U101&102, Neurology

This was a 6 week rotation; normally there are a lot more students but during my placement there were 4 of us, split in two between the day ward and conventional ward. The department specialises in MS treatment, and as such most of the day hospital cases would be patients coming in for monthly treatment of Tysabri (natalizumab), a 6-monthly check-up for MS. The work was quite heavy as there were only 2 of us; we were expected to see and write-up in the notes as many patients as possible in the morning unless they were due for senior review; but then you could often leave by 2pm or so. I didn't think it would be the most exciting placement to begin with, but MS can manifest as almost any neurological symptom and I have never practiced so many neuro exams before; I massively improved in my examination technique, and the team were friendly, especially the students with whom I ate and went for drinks with a few times. The final placement here coincides with the internes changing tracks so the vibe of the ward does change half-way through as they need time to get to grips with the workings of the ward.

There is a psychiatry lesson one morning a week and case discussions one morning a week; there are consultations that take place in the afternoons of which you are expected to attend a couple;

and the chef does a big ward round once a week on the other side of the department (the normal hospital ward). Here is also dominated by admission for MS symptoms, but you also see stroke, CJD, other inflammatory/auto-immune conditions like Guillan-Barre and myasthenia gravis, polyneuropathies; it is varied and a lot more exposure than I had in Manchester to neurology. Just learning medications can be hard as everything is in brand names and it's hard to translate that to what I knew about medications.

Carrying out skills other than ECGs are a daily possibility: I got to do a lumbar puncture, and also a 'biopsie glande salivaire accessoire (BGSA)' which involves cutting out a couple glands from the inside of patients' lips; one got done at least every week but I've never heard of it being carried out in the UK!? They use it to check for rheumatological/vasculitic histology I believe. Anyway that gives you the opportunity to inject local anaesthetic and cut a little bit if you're interested...

Tackling the bureaucracy...

There is a lot of form-filling and paperwork to do in the run-up to leaving; you get sent generic Erasmus forms with mention of credits etc, but just pick the specialties you want to do. Before arriving, I got mixed up with the forms and thought we had to pick from a set list that the 4th years in France would be studying; I only realised once arriving in Lyon that this wasn't the case. If anyone else has done similar, and there is a speciality you want to cover instead then Nadine (head of Erasmus for Lyon uni) will accommodate you changing placement, she just seems reluctant to begin with.

There's an evaluation sheet the French Erasmus office expect you to get signed off with each placement; as such it's quite difficult to get them to grips with the online medlea form, especially as it's not something that can be stamped. Getting forms validated can be a struggle, especially if you never see your chef de service often at all (they don't get very involved in ward work) and you've finished that placement. So advice is to get it done timely, and sort a meeting at least a week before you finish. Expect to also have more paperwork to sort when you arrive, mainly insurance to be on the wards (you will be told where to go to get this).

Useful links/contacts

Ouigo.fr

Skimania and sldski

Carte Jeune (€50 for a year's pass of heavily discounted train travel; a couple significant train

Get the student transport card (€28/month, €5 for the card)

Sports available: <http://suaps.univ-lyon1.fr/activites/> . For the basketball I sent an email, but for the rock climbing we just turned up.

Thoughts overall

Lyon has been an extremely positive experience; I thought I would be jealous of friends travelling half-way around the world during this time on electives but it's such a great opportunity to live for 4 months in a city and travel around the area, and Lyon is such a fun city. I'm not sure I would come back to work as a doctor in France, but I hope to use French-speaking skills in some work capacity in the future, and exposure to a different healthcare system has been enlightening. My French has improved considerably which was a massive aim of my elective, and have new-found friends on the continent to make trips to.