

Erasmus Report 2020/2021
École Normale Supérieure de Lyon
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Why I did a year abroad:

Despite my French nationality and ability to speak French fluently in a social context, my scientific vocabulary was limited due to living and studying in the UK since I was eight years old. I lacked technical language to discuss mathematics in French, so a year studying mathematics in France was the perfect solution for this. I deepened my understanding of mathematics throughout the year while subconsciously improving my French. In the future, I hope to flexibly work either in France or England, so a year in France was somewhat a necessity.

Why at L'ENS de Lyon:

Firstly, Lyon was somewhere that I had never visited in France. As the second largest city after Paris, it is a great place for students with plenty of things to do. On top of this, I wanted to receive the highest level of education possible. I had heard from previous Erasmus students that went to other universities that they had mainly done second year modules again. I did not want this to be the case, so I chose to study in Lyon. I was warned that studying at L'ENS de Lyon was going to be very challenging, and this was definitely the case, so keep this in mind when choosing which university to attend.

Arrival and residence:

As you probably already know, there is a lot of paperwork to fill when doing a year abroad. However, you should not have any issues if you keep on top of all the emails you receive, as all the information required will be in there. At the beginning of the year, I had to book an appointment to collect the keys to my room, but unfortunately my arrival date changed and there were no more slots available. Luckily, the student mobility department was very accommodating and found a way to fit me in. I lived in the student residence on the Monod campus and had my one person flat. Living in Monod allowed me to be very close to where maths lectures and TD ("Travaux Dirigés" – exercise session) took place. I also knew plenty of students that lived on the other campus called Debourg, only a 10-minute walk away from Monod. This short walk to lectures was not much of an inconvenience for them. In Debourg, students live in flats of 3-4 people, with an en-suite room and shared kitchen. Although objectively the residence in Debourg is generally nicer, there is a large variety of different rooms (with varying size, balcony, furniture, ect) and so a lot of luck involved with which room you end up getting. I recommend you choose between Monod and Debourg depending on whether you prefer having your own place or living with other students. Either way, you will have plenty of opportunities to meet other students throughout the year.

Academic:

As I signed up on G106, I followed all 8 mathematics modules over the course of both semesters and took all exams (both midterm and end of term). I also took a couple of programming modules to reach the required credits. These were particularly easy to sign up to, as all I had to do was email the two course leaders, both of which catered to my needs both as an international as well as mathematics student rather than computer scientist. As long as extra modules get approved by Warwick, it seems that L'ENS is happy to let you take whichever module you like.

I will not go into details of each mathematics module, as this can be found on other Erasmus reports by students from previous years, but will simply give my overall impressions.

Personally, I enjoyed the two Algebra modules the most, as I was able to follow lectures and get a deep understanding of the topics. I felt that my Analysis skills was not up to par with other students at l'ENS, despite my good grades at Warwick, and I struggled with "Analyse Complexe" and "Integration et Mesures". However, this was less of an issue in the second semester, as I adjusted to the language, style of teaching and exam style. This meant that I generally preferred modules in the second semester because of this, as I could focus on the maths itself. However, the biggest difference between modules was due to the TD-man (the person running the exercise sessions). These 2-hour weekly sessions allowed us to apply the knowledge learned in lectures, and gain a deeper understanding of the concepts. Therefore, the TD-man was crucial in making the topics interesting as well as easy to understand. I highly recommend you attend all of these sessions, as they are the most useful both for understanding as well as practicing exam questions. The latter is particularly important, as there is little time to revise for exams, due to shorter holidays, all exams crammed into a week, and a very early exam week in the beginning of May. Therefore, it is important to stay on top of your work, as there is no time to catch up.

As I have already said, it is important to stay on top of your work throughout the year, as mid-term exams are worth a third of each module. This is also the case for the assignments (two per module worth a total of a third of the module), so I recommend that you work on these with other students (in fact this is encouraged by l'ENS).

Sports and Social:

Unfortunately, due to a COVID stricken year, I was unable to experience the usual social opportunities, so I recommend you read previous reports from other students for this. However at the beginning of the year before another lockdown was announced, there were a lot of opportunities to meet other students in the gardens on both campuses, where students met during the day to chat and play cards, and in the evening for a few drinks. I was also able to take part in a few basketball training sessions at the start of the year before everything was shut, and as I signed up to the sports society (AS – association sportive), I had access to the facilities at any time, located just under my room. This was great as I was able to use the gym and basketball court at any time, which was generally free during the day, as sports clubs only used them in the evening.

Conclusion:

I had a fantastic year, which was highly rewarding, as I saw my hard work pay off by increasingly good results. If you are prepared to put in some time and effort, then you will learn a lot at l'ENS, and it may be the best place for you. As previously mentioned, the social aspect was also very present at the beginning of the year, and luckily I made some good friends at that time, which allowed me to continue my social life despite the school being unable to organise events.