

Sophie (BA English Literature & Theatre Studies (Work))

Erasmus Work placement student 2010-2011, a British Council language assistant in Flers, France
My Erasmus work placement year was fantastic- it gave me the opportunity for the change I was craving at the end of second year, and I have come back with more enthusiasm for putting my full effort into my third year studies.

The English department only introduced work placements in 2010 and I was really keen to take full advantage of the opportunity. Having originally considered studying abroad, the chance to work and have a complete change was even more appealing! I decided that if I was going to take a year out, I may as well put everything I had into it and decided that as I had studied French at school, this would be the perfect opportunity to fully develop my French language skills in a completely new and challenging environment.

I worked for 9 months teaching in 3 separate French primary schools and I absolutely loved it! I was well and truly thrown in at the deep end, as I had to speak French from the word go, but this means that now I am as confident speaking French as the people who did the same role as me and have a French degree too! Living in France has been invaluable for learning the language! I could have completed a work placement in the UK, but as well as a change in what I was doing, a change in place has also been really beneficial, and seeing a different culture adds a different dimension to the year.

Aside from the initial extra work I had to do to improve my French, the year wasn't without other challenges. I was put in a small French town, with just 6 other English speaking people, and generally a much older population than I was used to, and as such keeping busy was sometimes really difficult. This is actually an example of where the Erasmus grant was so helpful...as well as covering rent; I was also able to use the grant to travel to different towns where I met more assistants. This made such a difference to my year in general, and without this opportunity; it might have been a lot more challenging to meet people of my own age (without a car, and with fairly limited public transport!).

I made good friends with some of my teachers, and at the end of the year my main school said that the work I had done had been hugely beneficial to the school and teachers alike. I left with a great reference and the offer to go back whenever I could! I felt as if I really achieved something during my year, and I am proud to look back and know that I gave 100% to my job in France.

I think the fact that I don't do French as a degree might even have meant that my enthusiasm was greater because what I was doing was so new! My confidence has improved so much this year; just knowing that I can live on my own in a foreign country makes any challenges in England seem much less daunting, and spending a year in a working environment has allowed me to realize the true meaning of responsibility, and how important it is to conduct yourself well, but also to ask for help,

The skills which I have acquired this year and the change to my confidence mean that I now have an excitement for employment after university, and I'm sure they will stand me in good stead when the time arises to look for that! I have returned to university with a new found enthusiasm and an incredible year to look back on! GO FOR IT!