

French Work-Experience Visit, Montpellier October 2009



There are so many unknown elements in a week of work experience in France that it is impossible to be completely prepared in advance. The fourteen A Level French students who travelled to Montpellier on the first Saturday of half term had made their placement choices and had received details of their hours and general conditions, but the rest was yet to be discovered. After being greeted by their host families at the airport they quickly had to engage in French and start to familiarise themselves with the geography of the town, the public transport system and the location of their work place. One person was taken to the beach and nearby coast, whilst others wandered around the picturesque old area of the city. By midday on Sunday, when we all met on the impressive Place de La Comédie, there was a feeling of relief at seeing familiar faces, but some nervousness about the next day's employment. An enjoyable session at the bowling alley helped to dispel some of the anxiety.



The five students who worked in “la restauration et l’hôtellerie” had very different experiences. **Lucy Geddes** served breakfasts and did room service in the big Hôtel Mercure near the centre, whilst **Jenni Proudfoot** laid tables and served delicious desserts in the rather chic “Six Sens” (also 106) on the outskirts of the city. **Jemima Dickinson** in the Restaurant Verdi was not so fully occupied, but did cut a lot of French bread! **Natalie Jones** efficiently adapted her serving skills learned in Reigate’s “La Barbe” to the demands of the “Irish Corner” bar-restaurant (how unFrench sounding is that?). This was also the venue for the final evening celebration – a moment of accomplishment and shared enjoyment.



The radio-station placements were varied. **Edward Buchanan** (briefly) broadcast live on Monday morning, but much of his time at Radio “Divergence” with **Tom Chellis** was spent observing, learning how things functioned and listening to interviews on cultural topics . **Grant Millar**, on the other hand, at “Radio Aviva” could be heard on the local airwaves giving the weather forecast and broadcasting a compilation of music from his Ipod. He also translated the radio station’s Internet information into English.

One of the categories for placement was “Le Sport”. This choice took **William Crump** to “Aeriforme”, a popular fitness centre which was out of the town centre. Here he cleaned the equipment, attended to the customers and did some distribution of advertisement pamphlets on the street. **Hamish Elsey** and **Lucy Holding** were employed in sports shops in the big Polygone shopping centre where their work varied from unpacking, pricing and sizing garments to serving customers and answering enquiries; this can be daunting when faced with a heavy local accent and a specialised question about French football club kit!



When asked to describe the “worst moment of the week” on assessment questionnaires everyone’s answer was “la pluie”. On Wednesday there were violent winds and driving rain. **Alice Redfern**, working in “Le Relais”, a childrens’ activity centre, set off on a cinema excursion with a group of six-

year olds only to find that the tramlines were flooded and not functioning. All the children were soaked to the skin and the film was abandoned. She and **Theo Flack**, who was in the same placement, made quite an impression on Thursday when they cooked “éponge Victoria” for the shared “goûter anglais”. **Charlotte Mason** was with younger children in “La Crèche Costebelle”. She received a complimentary report commending her excellent adaptation to the care and entertainment of the children.



The most unusual and perhaps the most varied placement was **Simon Playford-Wall's** work at “Espace Laser”. Fitting equipment, explaining the rules, dealing with groups of laser-game players were all part of the challenge. He got on well with the friendly work team and his French vocabulary was significantly extended. The week was not all toil however, Edward was very thrilled to talk to one of his favourite francophone authors, Amélie Nothomb, when she signed her latest novel for him. The girls came with me to see the film “Le Petit Nicholas” – the French equivalent of Just William - which we all appreciated. The boys were watching the Liverpool – Lyon football match! Some of the host families were particularly welcoming and the students appreciated their excellent meals which were generally accompanied by intensive and varied discussion and conversation – and practice of the language in an authentic milieu is, after all, the main aim of the visit

