

# GOING INTERNATIONAL

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## Elective in Newcastle upon Tyne (UK) – Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery

by Virginia Wen.

### My Motivation

The United Kingdom was always a country of interest for me and I decided for myself quite early that I want to go there for a clinical rotation. As the worldwide COVID pandemic hit us in 2020, an internship abroad was impossible in this and the following years.

So as soon as regulations got loose, I began to do my research on where to go and my decision quickly fell onto the most northern city of England, **Newcastle upon Tyne**.

This city is one of the biggest cities in the northeast region and the hospital there – [Royal Victoria Infirmary](#) –one of the biggest and most important centers in this region.

Beside the broad variety of specialties and high medical proficiency, I also appreciated the nearness to the beautiful Scottish Highlands and to the seaside, which all contributed to my decision on choosing this city for my rotation as part of my last year of medical school.

My expectations on this rotation were to not only gain as much experience in the field of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery, but also to learn more about the British health system, also called [National Health Service \(NHS\)](#).

Furthermore, I also wanted to improve my Medical English and get to know more about the British people and culture.



### The Application Process

The application process was very clear and easy described on the [homepage of Newcastle University](#). As requirements can always change, I recommend to always check the homepage for the most up to date informations.

It is very important to apply as early as possible, no later than 6 months before the start of the elective.

For this elective, I had to submit a lot of paperwork, which included

# confirmation of my medical student status by the dean of my home university,

# liability insurance confirmation,

# criminal record certificate (OVRC)

# and a certificate of proficiency of the English language.

Please keep in mind that all these documents require time itself so please take care of it as early as possible.

I got a free liability insurance from my home university. Please contact your university and see if there is a similar offer of free insurance for you students too.

For the criminal record certificate, I contacted the citizens registration office of my hometown in Germany.

In this case I recommend you to do your research where to get it in your hometown.

In order to get a language certificate, I have done a test at the language department of my university.

This is item below very important – and of course very different to other clinical rotations:  
Furthermore, the university isn't responsible for your clinical supervisor of your elective so you have to contact a consultant **by your own** by searching on the homepage of [Royal Victoria Infirmary](#) and ask them if they can supervise you during your time here.  
Once all this is done and you followed the instructions of Newcastle University regarding the application process, there is nothing in the way to your elective in the Geordie's town!

### **My elective at Royal Victoria Infirmary (RVI)**

My supervisor sent me a rotation plan several weeks before the start of my elective and he asked me in advance if I have any special interest in a particular subspeciality or just wanted to have a broad insight into the exciting field of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery.  
As I have never done a rotation in Plastics before, I decided for the latter and therefore I was with a different consultant with a particular focus every week, which made my experience as diverse as possible.  
So I accompanied physicians, who treated adult or pediatric hands, head and neck abnormalities, skin cancer, sarcoma, burns and breast reconstructions in the following 8 weeks.  
My normal workday usually began at 8 am with attending the morning round, where all cases were discussed for the day, and ended between 4 pm and 5 pm.  
After rounds I went with my consultant to see the patients and I got the opportunity to take over patients on my own, taking the history and examine them.  
Once all patients were rounded, the surgical part began and we went to *theatre*, where all the surgeries were done.  
Most of the time I watched them doing the procedures, but I also got asked quite often if I wanted to scrub myself and join them on the table, which I very enjoyed.

The medical practice was very advanced and up to date but some aspects like scrubbing in theatre was a bit behind and I was a bit surprised how low hygienic standards were compared to Austria/Germany/Switzerland.  
But except of that I was very astonished how skilled and experienced every consultant was in their particular field and how they treated their patients with such care and empathy.  
They spend much time for their patients and try to answer all of their questions and concerns.  
Depending on the consultant I also visited different hospitals like the Freeman Hospital, which had a focus on head and neck, or private clinics, where the consultants had their private patients, giving me the possibility to get an authentic insight into their working life.  
I was also surprised how much time they are also spending on teaching us students regardless how busy the service was, this was also very different compared to Austria / Germany / Switzerland.

All in all, I felt quite involved in the team and the consultant always introduced me to their colleagues and encountered me on eye level, which made my experience very enjoyable!  
In general hierarchies are pretty flat there and students can ask the consultants every question without thinking twice like in my home country.  
The accent in the Great North is a bit different and sometimes difficult to understand. But if you are quite firm in the English language this shouldn't be a big problem and you are still able to understand them.  
Overall, most of the people speak a clear and lovely British English.  
There was no official teaching in the department but if you ask your personal consultant or have a special interest in a topic, they were always keen to take their time after clinics to tell you more about it.

The RVI is a teaching hospital of Newcastle University and an important centre for many diseases in the North East region with high tech equipment and state-of-the-art care. All specialties were offered. The hospital is a tertiary referral hospital providing 673 beds and is also an important research institution. The [Great North Children's Hospital](#) is part of the RVI and one of only 14 major children's medical centres in the United Kingdom. Therefore our patients were from all ages, both male and female and from all soci

## Insurance

It is very important to take care of your insurance coverage abroad! Even though I was a student at Newcastle University, I wasn't covered at all by them or the RVI. I got a free indemnity insurance from my home university and a free health insurance from my bank. If you stitch yourself with a needle or hurt yourself during surgery, it's also important to have an accident insurance as you are also not covered by the hospital, unlike in my home country. So it's best to ask your home university first, if they offer you students some coverage and otherwise arrange one on your own. Asking your bank or credit card institution may also be helpful as in most cases they offer you some kind of travel insurance.

## Living in Newcastle

Newcastle is a lovely city with their people called Geordies. The North East is famous for their friendly and welcoming nature and I felt very comfortable from my first day on. It's rich on history with the famous Hadrianswall going through and is also quite near to the sea with just a 30 min ride by metro, where you can get the best Fish and Chips. If you fancy the beautiful Scottish Highlands you have to go there and also visit their famous capital city – Edinburgh – which is just 2 hours away with the train.

I rented one of the rooms from the Staff and [Visitors accommodation](#) of Newcastle University and lived just 10 minutes away from the hospital. I recommend taking care of your accommodation as early as possible as it's also quite hard to find a room in Newcastle.

## Costs

Flight Vienna to Newcastle	approx. GBP 110
Accommodation in total (11 weeks)	approx. GBP 1700
Elective Fee	GBP 200
Food and drink per month	approx. GBP 500
Travel/Activities	approx. GBP 800
Return Flight	approx. GBP 140
<b>Total</b>	approx. GBP 3.450

## Interesting Links

Newcastle University – More informations regarding the Elective Program

<https://www.ncl.ac.uk/medicine/study/electives/>

Royal Victoria Infirmary – Main homepage with informations about the departments and consultants

<https://www.newcastle-hospitals.nhs.uk/hospitals/royal-victoria-infirmary/>

Newcastle University – Here you can find informations about the accommodations of Newcastle University and how to apply for it

<https://www.ncl.ac.uk/accommodation/staff-and-visitors/>

Visit Newcastle – Useful informations about activities in Newcastle and surrounding

<https://newcastle Gateshead.com/>

NUSU – This is the homepage of the Student Union with many informations about campus life and activities

<https://nusu.co.uk/>

Lundgren Tours – Tours for students by students to many places around Newcastle

<https://lundgrentours.com/>

Newcastle Public Transport – Informations about the Metro, Bus and Ferry for the Tyne region

<https://www.nexus.org.uk/>



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