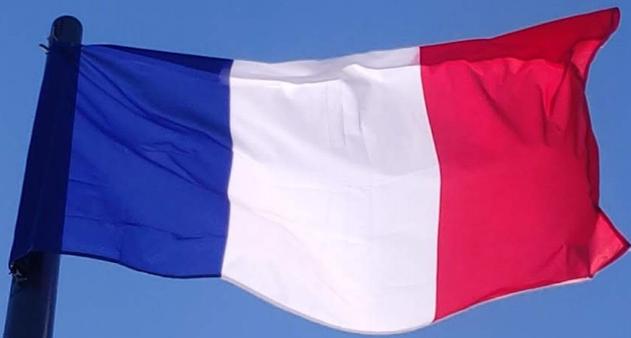


PARIS 2022



An AJ Pressland Fund Project
by Molly Patterson

All photos taken by myself

Introduction

Hello! My name is Molly and I am a third year Natural Scientist (studying Part II Astrophysics) at Jesus College. This summer I was very fortunate, thanks to the support of the AJ Pressland Fund, to spend two weeks in Paris studying an intensive French course and exploring the French capital for the first time in my life. This report will cover my language learning journey and experience of studying French in Paris.

Why French? / My Language Journey

My love of the French language goes back to my primary school days, when we would spend the summer holidays road tripping across France in our family camper van (named Bluebell). Some of my best childhood memories were made on French campsites - reading more books than I have read so far this year, exploring the seemingly vast sites with my brother to find the playgrounds and swimming pools, and writing French phrases in my notebook as my mother taught me them, so that I could ask the other kids their name and favourite colour. I broke my arm one year as I fell off a zipline during a visit to a campsite in Brittany, and on arrival at the nearest hospital my mum told the receptionist that I had "broken my arm tomorrow" (and panickedly attempted to demonstrate the concept of ziplining to a French doctor, following the painful discovery that the word for zipline was not in her Collins Pocket French dictionary). We were all very amused at the time by this subtle mistake, but it stuck with me throughout my school days, and while other students did not seem to understand the importance of studying French, I always enjoyed French lessons at school (even the dreaded GCSE speaking exam), and came out with top grades. I was almost persuaded to pursue A Level French by my teacher, who suggested the idea that French language training would be useful preparation for a career in the sciences. I switched to Chemistry the day before I began at Sixth Form, (a very good decision which later landed me a place to study Natural Sciences at Cambridge), however I always felt that I had missed out on learning French.

Not to worry though, for I soon discovered the Pressland Fund in my first year at Cambridge, and hopped on an advisory call with someone from the Language Centre, who was very helpful. I explained my intention to apply for the bursary and rediscover my enjoyment of French, and was advised to first complete a CULP course here in Cambridge to increase my chance of success. I booked onto the Intermediate 1 course in Michaelmas 2021 at the beginning of my second year, and completed this in Lent term of 2022. I thoroughly enjoyed my CULP lessons with Marie-Géraldine Lea and found the class to be really friendly and a welcome break from the intensity of the Natural Sciences tripos.

During this time, I submitted my application for the Pressland Fund. Completing the application was fairly straightforward once I had done some research and was clear on the details of my potential trip to Paris, including my language school and accommodation of choice, although it did force me to think pretty hard about the link between my simple enjoyment of language learning and its overall benefits to my studies and future career, which I talked through with my DoS, who was really encouraging and helpful. Science is a highly collaborative profession, with CERN being the most well known European physics collaboration, and I feel that working towards fluency in French has the potential to unlock many opportunities for future study and work abroad.

I never expected that my application would be successful, so I was overjoyed when I found out that I was successful, and got to work on organising my trip. I also successfully applied for further funding from my College to cover the remainder of the estimated cost of the trip.

Why Paris?

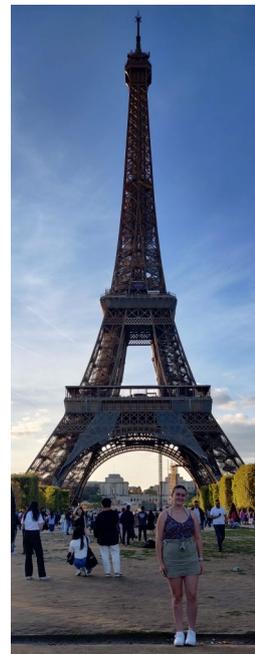
I had never been to Paris before (despite a quick-flying-drive-through on one of my previously mentioned holidays to France, where we didn't stop to explore, but my Dad decided to drive our campervan around the notoriously dangerous Arc de Triomphe roundabout for fun), and it felt like an obvious choice for a young person travelling alone for a couple of weeks. I initially had the idea to incorporate this trip into some wider travels of Europe in the weeks preceding my language course and knew that I would easily be able to get to Paris by rail (later made impossible by an internship in the UK), and that getting around Paris wouldn't be a problem with the reliable Paris Metro.

I also knew that language schools would be plentiful across the city, so I would have many options for where to study, although accommodation would be slightly more difficult / expensive, especially during the busy summer months. I found the school, France Langue, during my research pre-application, and noted that they offered an option to organise accommodation for their students, which could be homestay or student accommodation depending on your preference. I always had the preference of staying in student accommodation, as I felt it would offer a more authentic experience of meeting people my own age in France, living independently and doing as I pleased in my free time. However, as France Langue charged a significant extra fee for placement into one of their student accommodation options, I decided that I would try to look for something myself to avoid this unnecessary extra cost, but it was nice knowing that I could use this as a backup if I struggled to find somewhere to stay whilst planning my trip.

Paris is, of course, known as a beautiful city and the cultural capital of France (and the world!) so I was excited by the idea of walking around Paris in the afternoons, exploring the many districts, visiting all of the celebrated landmarks, museums and art galleries. I was of course apprehensive about my first trip abroad alone, but I knew that I would never feel lonely in among the lively buzz of Paris with endless things to do and see.



The Louvre



Le Tour Eiffel

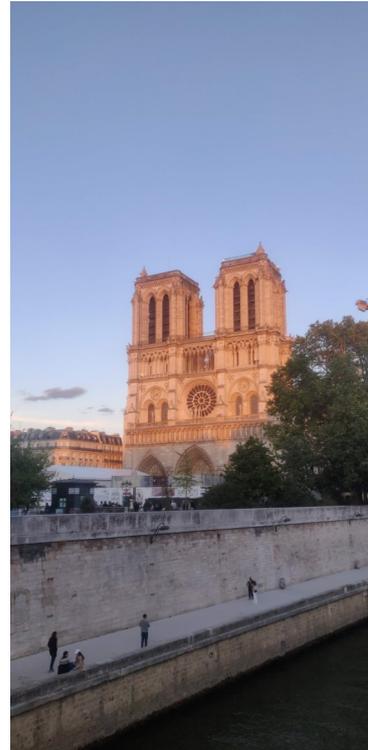
A Short Foreword to any Future / Prospective Pressland Fund Applicants

Please consider applying if you are at all interested in learning a language - I simply cannot recommend it enough! If you are (understandably) too busy to read the rest of my report in full, the one thing I would like to ask you is this :

When again in your life will you be presented with the opportunity to travel abroad alone, meet, live and become friends with complete strangers from all over the world, completely immerse yourself in another language and culture and explore a new city, all whilst completing an intensive language course, at little or no cost to yourself?

This was one of the best decisions that I have ever made and it led to one of the most enriching experiences of my life, something I never would have considered without the financial support available from the Pressland Fund. I strongly believe that this is one of the best opportunities on offer to students here, and encapsulates what University is really about - pushing yourself out of your comfort zone, getting out there and experiencing life while you are young, realising your independence and ability to connect with people (even when you are in a foreign country for a short period of time), learning for enjoyment and taking control of the development of valuable skills outside of your degree.

I am more than happy to be contacted for advice on the Pressland Fund application process, trip planning, or Paris in particular (as well as my experience of CULP courses), so don't hesitate to get in touch if you would like to chat!



Notre Dame

Learning at France Langue

Apprendre à France Langue



France Langue Paris
Notre Dame

At France Langue I enjoyed the best teaching I have experienced in my life (no hard feelings towards any Physics lecturers), as the teachers there are truly exceptional. I avidly recommend France Langue to anyone considering a French course, and although I attended the Paris Notre-Dame school, they have several school locations across France which I am sure offer an equally fantastic learning experience.

The school was located on a street just opposite Notre-Dame, which made for a surreal walk to classes in the mornings, past L'Hôtel de Ville and over the Seine. I often chose the scenic 45 minute walk to class as I enjoyed the atmosphere of Paris in the mornings and saved a small amount of money on metro tickets. On the days when I was running late, the metro was a very convenient option, with tickets costing only €1.90, metros coming every few minutes and the journey taking around 20 minutes including walking.

In the heart of the Latin quarter, France Langue's central location was great for seeing lots of the city on my daily commute and finding places to eat and explore on my lunch breaks. It was situated just next to a small and beautiful park (jardin public), the Square René Vivianvi, which was a lovely place to sit and relax or chat with course mates between classes.

On my arrival at France Langue on the first Monday morning, I joined a queue of new starters and was somewhat surprised when one of the teachers came outside and addressed us all in French. Not understanding a word, I followed everyone inside, checked in and took a seat in the downstairs library with a few other students, where I soon realised we were waiting for our entry speaking tests as we chatted in French.

This was, to my relief, only a short conversation with one of the teachers, and didn't seem to affect which class I was placed into. Although, unfortunately, the teacher who had conducted my test misdirected me to an A1 level classroom instead of the introductory meeting for new starters that morning, where I was concerned to find a small group of students learning to count to 100 in French, and was sent away after a short conversation with the teacher once she discovered my knowledge of the passé composé. An altogether quite stressful first morning at school, but this was quickly resolved by the France Langue team who kindly informed me that I was in fact a B1 level student and redirected me to the introductory meeting, where I was given a timetable and the course structure and extracurricular activities were explained.

I then joined my first general French lesson that morning with Annabelle Hernandez, an excellent French teacher. New students joined the class every Monday, so the first task was for the new students (les nouveaux) to get to know the existing students (les anciens), and then introduce your partner to the class. There were around 10 students in the class at any one time, and it had a very friendly and welcoming atmosphere.



Square René Vivianvi

Many of Annabelle's classes began by chatting to us about what we had been up to the previous afternoon or over the weekend, which would then naturally develop into an extended class discussion (sometimes lasting up to an hour!) about a particular student's cultural experience in Paris, with many recommendations of places to visit. This class would last all morning, typically from 9-12:15, with a short break (petit pause) about halfway through, and despite its length it felt as though it went extremely quickly due to the fun energy Annabelle brought to the class and the space for informal discussion on almost anything.

During the classes we completed various tasks focussed on reading, writing, speaking and listening, with grammar taught in short interludes on a whiteboard. This was all taught in spoken and written French, and although this was initially daunting, it helped me immensely to develop my skills over the course of the two weeks. The most noticeable marker of my progress during the course was going from not understanding the majority of what Annabelle said in the first lesson, (but being able to follow the class due to her emphasis on the important words and phrases and clarification of difficult points), to feeling as though I understood almost every word by my last lesson. The class worked on a rolling basis with new students leaving and starting every week, and a new general theme to the lesson content. The theme of my first week was France and French culture, and the second week was travel themed. Different grammar points and tenses were also covered each week, and during my time there we revised le passé composé, l'imparfait and le futur simple, as well as learning le plus que parfait and the use of tenses in la condition et l'hypothèse. Overall I felt that there was a good coverage of grammar, although would have preferred less time spent on revision and more time on new learning.

In the afternoons, I attended the At elier Thematique, or Thematic Workshop. These were somewhat more relaxed, shorter lessons with a different teacher, which also followed the general theme of the week in the school, but with a daily focus on a particular aspect of French culture or language. There was often much less to write down from these classes, as they were typically much more speaking based, but I did pick up a lot of useful vocabulary from these lessons. The group was also larger, with around 15 students at any time. The teacher, Denis Marchais, was really friendly and absolutely hilarious. He started the first lesson by asking everybody's names and nationalities, which he used as the inspiration for many of his jokes in class, often speaking to me in an impressively accurate cockney accent. I could only describe his lessons as like watching an hour and a half of live French comedy, with audience participation. I often caught him smoking outside of the school during breaks and after class, where he would stop me for a chat and talk about his trips to England, including his love of British pubs and his bemusement by the concept of ice cream vans in the UK. I also happened to be in Paris during the death of Queen Elizabeth II, which became a major topic of discussion in one of our classes as he talked of the French love for the British monarch and their sadness in reaction to her death.

I was amazed by the focus on speaking in these classes, which was always a great opportunity to practice the concepts learnt in the morning classes and develop a real confidence in conversation. Denis would always swiftly correct grammatical errors in speaking before allowing you to continue, meaning that you learnt quickly from your mistakes, but never felt intimidated by speaking in class for fear of getting something wrong, as everybody was invited to speak and allowed to make mistakes, which often became a learning point for the whole class. Sometimes the whole class was spent speaking, and the worksheet that was intended to form the lesson was set as homework and discussed the following day. I found this beneficial, as I valued the time speaking and listening in class more than time spent doing a worksheet that I could complete in my own time in the evenings.

I also had 30 minute Personal Coaching sessions with Denis once a week, on a Friday afternoon after class. During this session I was able to ask any questions I had about grammatical points made in lessons, Paris in general, or use it as an opportunity to practice speaking. We typically ended up just chatting in French for the allocated time, he would ask me questions (usually about my life as a student in Cambridge), I would respond, and we would go from there and pick up on any grammatical errors I had made. This one-on-one session was great for addressing my particular misunderstandings and getting deeper explanations of particular elements of grammar. It also, of course, was invaluable conversational practice with a French native, and I surprised myself in the first session with my ability to speak for long periods of time as opposed to the short responses often required in class, giving extended answers to Denis' questions and finding myself suddenly able to say exactly what I would have wanted to say in English, rather than adjusting the content of my conversation down to meet my French ability. His great English ability also made it very easy to ask for particular translations of words and phrases.

All of the resources for both classes were printed and provided by the school, so there was no need to purchase additional resources such as textbooks, all you needed was some way of taking notes. France Langue also has an online element on Microsoft Teams, where I was able to contact my teachers and was part of a group channel for the whole Paris school. Teachers would share cultural events, news articles and the programme for the weekly activities organised by the school here. They ran visits to local museums and historic sites, however I did not manage to take part in these because they clashed with the afternoon classes, which students on the super intensive programme were required to attend daily. There was also an online "Rencontre Thématique" (Thematic Workshop) on Wednesday evenings which was compulsory for the super intensive course, but optional for the intensive and standard course students. This workshop covered a different cultural topic each week. The first session I attended was led by an external speaker, and discussed studying and working in France, which I found interesting and relevant to my interest in exploring a career in France in future. The second week, led by another teacher at the school, was about French music and included a music quiz. There was also an optional "Visite Virtuelle" (Virtual Visit) on Teams on Monday evenings, which I chose not to attend as I was usually busy exploring Paris of my own accord. Access to the Teams channels continues for 3 months after the end of your course, so I am still able to read posts here. I was also informed by Denis that it is possible to contact your personal coach for up to 2 weeks after leaving the school if you want help with anything in particular, however I was unfortunately too busy catching up on summer work to benefit from this opportunity.

Overall, although the super intensive course at France Langue was quite costly, I thought it was justified by the quality of teaching and I would recommend it to others for a great language learning experience and an emphasis on developing your ability and confidence in speaking.

Teachers & Friends at France Langue



Me and my General French teacher, Annabelle



Me, my classmate Haruka and our Atelier Thematique teacher, Denis



Me and my coursemate Jasmine

I found it very easy to make friends at France Langue, and as the only British student enjoyed getting out of my comfort zone and talking only in French to other students from all across Europe and the world. As we were all studying together at the same level, there was no pressure to speak perfect French.

Pictured above is my Japanese friend Haruka from the afternoon class with Denis. We are still in touch (messaging in French!) and I am going to see her when she next visits London.

Pictured on the left is my German friend Jasmine from the morning class with Annabelle, on her last day at school at the end of my first week. We spent our lunch breaks together eating in the park or going for a crêpe together and chatting in French about our lives back home.

Life in Paris

La vie parisienne

I arrived in Paris late on a Friday evening, took the RER train to Gare du Nord and a metro to Alexandre Dumas, which was helpfully only a 2 minute walk from the Association du Foyer de Charonne, where I would be staying. I was shown around the Foyer by a lovely member of weekend staff and given the keys to my room, which I was happy with, despite the luminous green flooring. My first weekend in Paris consisted mainly of walking around the local area to get my bearings, buying a few things that I needed to live such as food, a plate and a mug (thankfully the Foyer kindly lent me some things to use for cooking as I was only staying for a short period of time) and getting acquainted with some of the students in the residence. I did walk to La Place de La Nation where I watched the chaos of the skateboarders, before passing by Notre Dame to find the location of the language school in preparation for the following week, for which I rewarded myself with a beer at the food festival taking place that weekend outside L'Hotel de Ville.

I found it difficult to integrate socially as the only English person there, but made a few friends and spent some time sitting outside in the Foyer garden practicing my listening, although I couldn't make out much of their incredibly fast paced, likely slang filled conversations. In group situations it was easy to feel out of place and awkward, perhaps with the majority of people there not knowing that I was "l'étudiante anglaise", however in smaller group and one on one encounters everyone I spoke to was really friendly, and we would flip between French and English as required, them helping me with French phrases and me helping them with English. My next door neighbour took an instant disliking to me during the first week as I had slept through a fairly loud alarm one morning, but I was strangely pleased in the knowledge that I understood the entirety of her very quickly spoken, angry French complaint and was able to respond in my half asleep state with a profuse apology. I would definitely say that making friends in the student foyer was the biggest challenge of my trip, but it definitely pushed me out of my comfort zone and helped me with trying to "tune in" to the fast pace of natively spoken French by listening to group conversations, although it was frustrating being unable to partake in them. In hindsight I would have perhaps found this easier if I had chosen the option of being placed in a student residence by the language school, with other learners of French as a foreign language, as we would have been able to converse at a similar level with each other and it may have made it easier to approach the natives also staying there.

Everything became easier when two of my English friends, Tim and Chloe (who I had met on my internship in the UK just a few weeks prior!) arrived to visit me in Paris. Tim had an intermediate level of French from having previously lived in France for a short time, and an impressive confidence in speaking to natives that did not seem to come as naturally to me. We would often go out in the evenings to our favourite local bar, Le Nouveau Carillon, where we (Tim) befriended the staff and regularly conversed in French with them. One evening I accidentally left my phone on a table there, but they kindly kept it safe for me whilst I ran the short distance back and reminded me of this embarrassment on every subsequent visit. I had feared that my visiting English friends would shield me from full immersion, but it had quite the opposite effect, and presented many opportunities to truly experience Paris in a way that I would not have had the confidence to do alone, visiting cafes, bars, restaurants and nightclubs. On our first eventful night out we met a couple, Matt and Guillaume who soon became good friends of ours. Matt was English and Guillaume French, so we spoke in a mixture of French and English, with Guillaume even telling me that my

We ticked off the Arc de Triomphe, Champs Elysees and Tour Eiffel on the weekend together before Chloe headed home early the following week. Tim stayed on for a few days, and we met up one afternoon to visit the Louvre in our stunning t-shirts purchased from a tourist trap next to the Tour Eiffel, pictured below. After our encounter with the Mona Lisa herself, we headed in search of food and stumbled upon a small creperie for a crepe and a glass of wine to celebrate our efforts. We got chatting to the waiter, Rui, a very friendly Frenchman, also pictured below, before one final quiet night out before Tim's departure.

The rest of my week I unfortunately did not experience much culture, as I was culturally exhausted following my wild excursions with Tim and Chloe, and had some catching up to do on my summer work. I packed in as much as possible on my final Saturday in Paris after the end of classes, which I began with a walk to the Père Lachaise cemetery which was very close to my accommodation. I came across a bookshop en route, and popped in to see if I could find any French literature at my level. The shop assistant was very helpful, and recommended me "Un Afghan à Paris", a supposedly true (she didn't seem to think so - describing it as "too beautiful to be true") story about an Afghan refugee who came to Paris speaking no French, and learnt the language through reading the literary works of the great writers who's names he found inscribed on headstones in the Père Lachaise cemetery. I bought it and visited the cemetery, where instead of writers I searched for the graves of the great French scientist Joseph Louis Gay-Lussac and mathematician Joseph Fourier. I took myself on a more thorough tour of the Louvre, actually stopping to appreciate the art instead of making a beeline for the Mona Lisa, before failing to reach L'Orangerie in good time before closing, so unfortunately missing out on Monet's Water Lilies, which I would have loved to see, but I am glad to have at least one good excuse to return to Paris in the near future. My only regret is not planning a longer trip so that I would have had more time to plan such visits on the weekends, as it was rather difficult to find time after my classes.



Me, the Mona Lisa and Tim



Me and Tim outside the Louvre in our silly t-shirts



Tim, Creperie waiter Rui and myself

In Summary

En résumé

To summarise my ramblings in this report, I thoroughly enjoyed my time in Paris studying French with the generous support of the Pressland Fund and am extremely grateful to have had the opportunity of undertaking such an incredible, inspirational trip. I found many personal benefits to this "mini gap year" experience over the summer, as I found it refreshed and rejuvenated me after a difficult year and a long internship before my return to Cambridge for another term. I was beyond happy with the quality of teaching at France Langue, formed great relationships with my teachers and fellow students from all over the world, and rediscovered my love of learning.



Me and Chloe at the Arc

What's Next?

Et après?

I am now embarking on another CULP Course - this time Intermediate 2, which I feel well prepared for following my time at France Langue - to further develop my French ability and pursue the ultimate goal of fluency. I hope to one day be able to confidently hold conversations with natives, in Paris and beyond, whether on leisure trips, studies or in my future scientific career. I look forward to discovering more of France and its language.

Trip Details

Détails du voyage

Course

France Langue Super Intensive - 30 lessons / 22.5 hours per week

Cost - €1000

Accommodation

Association du Foyer de Charonne - 16 nights at €31 per night + €20 bedding hire

Cost - €516

Flights

EasyJet - Edinburgh to Paris Charles de Gaulle, return

Cost - £112

Train & Metro

Approx Cost ~ €75

Food & Drink

Would really rather not know

Silly T-Shirts

Cost - €15

Total Cost

Approx £1500

– Pressland Fund Award £1000

– College Travel Grant £400

= Approx £100 cost to myself for an unforgettable trip, priceless French language skills, and a silly t-shirt