



THE GREEN BOOK

A VERY HANDY BOOK IF YOU HAPPEN
TO BE AN IRISH STAGIAIRE IN BRUSSELS.

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WINTER STAGE, 2009

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Introduction.

Welcome to the Green Book, a survival guide if you happen to be an Irish Stagiaire in Brussels. In conjunction with European Movement Ireland, past and current stagiaires have come together to make your Stage run as smoothly as possible. We've tried to avoid it being simply an Irish Guide to Brussels, but rather something that contains practical information we wished we knew before going.

Let me start by saying that this guide is far from comprehensive, but at the least, we hope that you'll find it useful. Whether you live by it or not, we want you to feel free to re-shape it afterwards and keep the information up to date.

For all the parts they played, I'd like to thank Andrea Pappin, Anita McKay and everyone who helped out from the European Movement Ireland; Aislinn McCrory, Daniel Galvin, Nora Delaney, Ciara Daly, Peter McQuade, Aine Walsh, Katherine Dolan, Emilie Balbirnie, Reachbha Fitzgerald, Joe Spooner, Colm Ó Huiginn, Ruth Kelly, Seamus Howard; all the Irish in SJ and, last but definitely not least, all the all other SJ stagiaires.

As for the content we have tried to be honest, informative and lacking the hyperbole of the stage committee. They'll probably tell you that this is going to be the best time of your life. It may be or it may not be, but one thing is guaranteed, it will be an experience. You'll certainly meet some interesting people, you'll hopefully do some interesting work and you'll probably have some interesting times. You'll encounter Franglais, Madame PeePee and a climate so grey and dismal that you'll never get homesick. Welcome to the stage, I hope you enjoy it.

Cian Mansfield
Winter stage, 2009

Welcome to Top Gun.



Many, many moons ago, an Irish girl fresh from college sat in a large meeting hall in the middle of Brussels. Nervous about the fact that she really only had pidgin French, had a name that made her sound like an Italian boy, and really not sure what lay ahead, she sat and listened to a range of speakers, including President Prodi, telling her how she and her fellow stagiaires were the future of the European Union and that we should all feel very proud about getting one of the coveted places on the Commission stage programme. She felt that all that was needed was for some guy to walk to the podium and say, "Stagiaires, welcome to Top Gun." After those six months in Brussels, she stayed involved in European affairs and is now involved in European Movement Ireland. That girl is me.

When I now travel to Brussels, I am still struck by the unidentifiable nature of Plat du Jour (page 21), just how much coffee is drunk in Brussels, how the Irish network is something to behold in Europe and how some of my closest friends are still those who I met at that opening conference. And how this all started with a family friend telling me, "Ever heard of the EU stage?"

To you all who played a part in this book, a huge thanks from us at European Movement Ireland. From new stagiaires in Dublin and in Brussels, to well-seasoned Belgian residents and to those who are Ireland-based who gave us your expertise - please know that you've all done a fantastic job in breathing life into this document and being the first to help us establish what we hope will be a great tradition for all Irish people new to the EU system.

Our biggest thanks of all must go to Cian Mansfield. Not only did he take on the job of chief editor and drafter of this document, but he did this while himself settling into his Commission stage. No mean feat, and one that we are most grateful to him for – his dedication to this job has made this document so much more than what we had originally thought possible.

I think a huge endorsement of Cian and his colleagues' work as been our communications stagiaire in the office, Anita – who when she finished her work of polishing up the document commented, "You know, I'd know exactly what I would need to do if I got a stage." We hope that the next class of Irish stagiaires that will start the Summer stage will feel the same way.

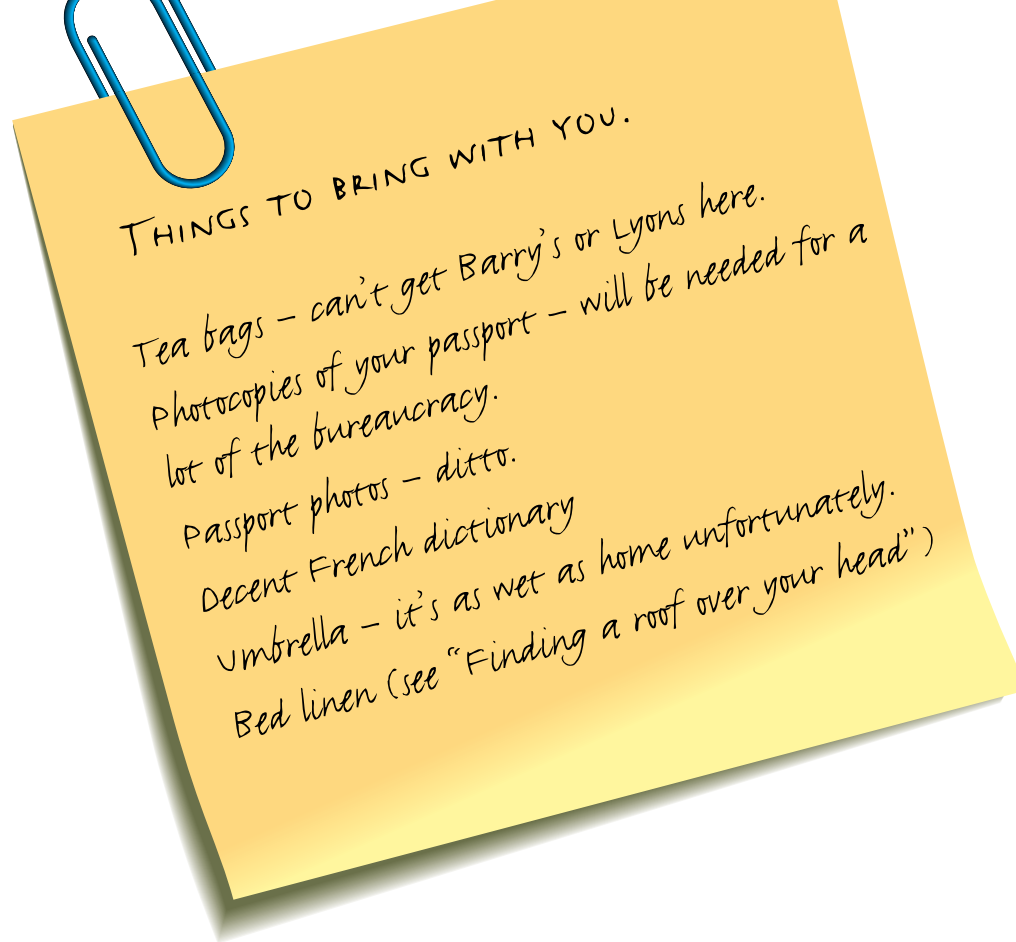
Until the next Green Book.

Andrea
Executive Director
European Movement Ireland



“You are like a breath of fresh blood.”

Quote of the welcome conference, from the opening speech:



You've arrived.

What do you do first?

1. Get a bed for your first few nights.

The first thing you need to do is get a base for a few days, while you are hunting for a place to live. There are buckets of hotels around Brussels, or else you can bed down in a youth hostel. Two days should be enough (though be prepared for it to take longer!) and it's a good idea to have this booked before you arrive.

Two popular Youth Hostels:
Breughel +32.2.511.0436
Sleepwell +32.2.218.5050

2. Find the roof over your head for the next few months.

We've found that the best way is to use the Internet. We would recommend starting your search on the internet before you touch down in Brussels. A good hunt on the internet before you go means that you can arrive in Brussels with a vague idea of what you are looking for; what's out there and what you should expect to pay. Do make sure that you 'Google map' the address of anywhere you're considering online to actually see where the flat is located. Some districts can be deceptively large and stretch quite far from where you actually want to be.

Another good possible way of finding flats in Brussels is to simply walk around the areas in which you would like to live. People frequently just advertise with little "A LOUER" signs in their windows.

Once you've found a possible location, phone up and get an appointment to view - and the rest should be pretty straight forward.

Price: the general price range for flat in Brussels is from €400-€700/month. You can usually expect to find a quality flat in a good area of Brussels for around the €500 mark.

A couple of tips:

- Many places will insist on a one-year lease. Leases can be changed and apartments can be sub-let but you may consider this to be more hassle than it's worth.
- Many apartments are also unfurnished. While inconvenient, unfurnished apartments with long leases will normally have cheaper rents than furnished apartments available on a short-term basis.
- Beware that even furnished apartments won't provide bed linen so bring your own or prepare to get them your first couple of days.
- It's pretty standard for a landlord to insist that you pay one month's deposit.



Some useful websites for finding a place to stay:

BruKot <http://www.brukot.be/>

Trainees in Brussels - Le Temps d'un Stage

<http://www.traineesinbrussels.be/>

Colocataires <http://www.colocation.fr/homepage.php>

Expatriates.com

<http://www.expatriates.com/classifieds/belgium/hs/>

Ex-pats <http://www.xpats.com>

ICA <http://www.icab.be/residenceprogramme.php>

Immoweb <http://www.immoweb.be/fr>

Residential Accommodation in Brussels

<http://www.languesvivantes.com/lviimm/Intro.htm>

The Bulletin (weekly English Magazine about life in Brussels)

<http://www.thebulletin.be>

Vlan newspaper <http://www.vlanimmo.be>

Flatshare <http://www.appartager.be>

Easy Life in Brussels <http://www.easylifeinbrussels.be>

Viva Street <http://www.vivastreet.be>



Choosing your district

There are loads of areas to choose from in Brussels - here are some thoughts as to where you might want to stay for your few months....

Etterbeek.

Good in a sense that it is very close to the Commission, Place Lux, Flagey and other places you'll spend much of your week. However, it can seem a little dead at the weekend and at night. For shopping there is a Colruyt, Aldi, Delhaize and Carrefour; and every Sunday there is a very impressive market at Place Jourdan. Also a sports centre with a swimming pool can be found in the La Chasse area of Etterbeek at 71 Rue des Champs.

Ixelles.

A good area with lots of shops, bars, restaurants, laundries and cinemas. It's also close to town and to the institutions. However, be warned. The district itself is huge so definitely check out how far your flat would be from the city centre and from Schuman where the European institutions are located. The area around Porte de Namur is best as it is very close to both.

Saint Josse-ten-Noode.

A maximum of a 15-minute walk to Schuman. It's half way between the European Quarter and the city centre. It's close to Madou metro station and to Tour de Madou (where the Bureau de stages and the Stage Liaison Committee is based).

St. Gilles.

Saint Gilles is a very mixed - there are some areas that are slightly rough, and there are other areas that are trendy and bohemian. The Parvais De Saint Gilles is the focal point of the district. It hosts a daily fresh fruit and veg market with stalls selling all wares from 8am to 2pm, but it is a lot bigger at the weekends. There's also a good selection of reasonably priced bars and restaurants around the Parvais such as Brasserie De l'Union (named after a legendary football team), Maison De Peuple and Bar a' Gilles. Most of these have free live music at the weekends. At the other end of the commune it touches upon Ixelles and the lovely Place Chatelain which also hosts a Wednesday night market from 6pm. Saint Gilles is strongly influenced by the Architect Horta and indeed the Horta Museum is on Rue America, therefore most of the houses and cafes are in the particular Brussels Art Nouveau style. Saint Gilles enjoys excellent public transport links but there are no big parks.

"In my personal experience I really enjoy living in Saint Gilles as the daily market, variety of Art Nouveau cafes and homes give it a strong neighbourhood and truly Brussels feel. But it is further away from the EU area and you will probably have to be prepared to take a metro to your DG." - Ciara.

City Centre.

"I find living in the centre good (De Brouckere/Saint Gery). You save money on taxis at the weekends and there are a lot of amenities like supermarkets, internet cafes and shops. However it can feel a bit dodgy at nighttime...definitely wouldn't be comfortable walking home alone. It is also a bit dirtier than other districts." - Aine



City Centre vs. Suburbs,

One stagiaire's opinion - Aislinn McCrory

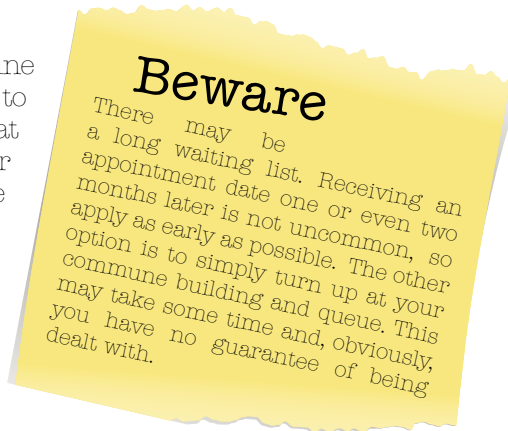
"Everyone wants to live in the city centre right? Well, in Brussels not quite. There are lots of advantages to living so central but it's important to note the downsides of having a Brussels 1000 address.

Pros: Surprisingly, the rent in the centre of Brussels is actually quite cheap. When looking for accommodation, I viewed some houses and flats in the suburbs (nearer to Evere where I work) and these places were in fact much more expensive. It is actually possible to get a room for around €400 with bills included in the heart of the city. Obviously the big plus points are the facilities: everything from cinemas and bars to supermarkets and launderettes are all in walking distance if you live in the centre. Anything worth seeing that isn't in the centre is easily accessible as most metro and bus lines pass through De Brouckere.

Cons: To put it bluntly, De Brouckere just isn't as pretty as many of the other districts. It's dirtier and well, a bit rougher. If you are female, walking alone after dark isn't the most comfortable experience as groups of young men tend to hang around the metro entrances and on corners, staring, muttering at passers by and being generally intimidating. Most of these men are harmless but it still isn't nice. There are lots of good bars and clubs in De Brouckere but unfortunately most stagiaire drinking based meetings seem to take place elsewhere (at Place Lux, Place Jourdan or in the general Schuman area)."

3. Register with the Belgian authorities to confirm that you are living there.

Now this all depends on what commune you are living in, so the first step is to check on the commune website what the procedures are and where your communal office is located. All the addresses and procedures can be found at <http://www.bruxelles.irisnet.be>. Most communes will allow you to make an appointment to register via email. For example, in Saint Gilles you can email population.1060@stgilles.irisnet.be or ring at - 02.536.02.4749.



Once you have made the appointment the commune will arrange for the police to visit your address so make sure your name is on the door. They only check the name on the door and don't actually come in. Still, don't be surprised if you see some police looking sketchily around your front door.



You need to bring two copies of your passport, proof of address (lease which must be complete and include the floor number), Belgian contact details, your EC contract, four passport photos and your medical insurance card. In addition, they will charge you €30. At the appointment the commune will review the documents and if satisfied you will be registered.

You can ask for an electronic ID card and, if you have gone to the trouble of registering, it is worth getting this as it is a handy and can be used when purchasing things on-line, such as train tickets. If you ask for the card you will be given a receipt and your pin will be posted within a few weeks. This is annoying, but to actually collect the card you have to return to the commune with the pin and only then do you receive the card.

Now, we've got to tell you that there are mixed reports to the 'registering in Brussels' step. Many have done it but some haven't. We'll leave that up to you.

"Avoid the Town Hall!! Its not worth it!...You will waste half a day there and be asked to return monthly!" – Anonymous stagiaire, 2009

4. Get a bank account.

To open a bank account you need three things - a copy of your passport, a copy of your EC contract and a proof of address in your home country.



No bank per se is better or worse. There a number of banks you can use such as Fortis, ING and DEXIA. They are all competent banks and provide roughly the same services. Of the three, Fortis and ING would be the most commonly used both by Commission personnel and the Commission accounts also.

There are a number of bank branches around Schuman which are specifically equipped to help set up new accounts (including for stagiaires). Here they will also speak English but do expect infuriating queues at lunchtime.

Given the language barriers here in Brussels, seeking to open an account away from the institutions may mean your French or Flemish must be top notch as all the documents and staff may not be able to use English. If your language skills are up to scratch then I would suggest booking an appointment in a branch in one the French speaking communes to avoid queues and long waits.

There is generally one type of bankcard which has two services within it - Bancontact and Proton. This may not always be the case so you should ask to make sure you have both these services when opening your account.

Bancontact (Mister Cash) is analogous to a debit card in Ireland. It allows you to purchase goods or services in any shop which accepts it or Maestro. You may also use it back home or withdraw money from any machine which accepts Maestro cards.



Proton is a very useful service used for small transactions. You will most likely be using it when you're eating lunch in the Institution canteens and cafés. It essentially allows the cardholder to 'load' funds on to his/her bank card to use immediately. As a result, there is no need to enter any chip and pin, therefore, allowing purchases to go through within seconds.

However, you must also be aware that once money has been transferred to the Proton part of your card, it can be used by ANYONE. It's a good idea to limit yourself to using only small denominations at a time (eg loading up €50 for a week's worth of lunches). If you lose your card the money loaded on for Proton is gone for good. There are Proton-loading machines in many of the Institution cafeterias and it can also be done via all ATM machines in Belgium. All you have to do is to transfer the funds via chip and pin for immediate use later on.

5. Get yourself stocked up

Getting stuff done can be a real pain in Belgium, especially since almost all shops close on Sundays and you may be too hungover on Saturday to do anything. As everyone else is also trying to do everything they have to do on Saturdays, the city centre is chaos. Belgian service is not exactly rapid at the best of times and Saturdays are definitely not the best times.

"For those in Beaulieu there is a very large Carrefour supermarket located beside the Delta metro stop that sells a vast array of products including sheets, quilts, pillows, electronics and kitchenware."



Supermarket shopping -
Lidl really does seem to be the cheapest for food.
Carrefour has Heinz Baked Beans and also the best drinks selection.



Furniture

If you need to buy furniture for your flat there is an IKEA located in Anderlecht, 5 minutes walk from CERIA metro station.



TIP: If you need certain household products such as towels, plates, etc., and you only have time to get them on your lunch break, you may be best off going to the Metro Shop in De Brouckere station as there are no decent shops for that sort of thing located in the European Quarter. It only takes 15 minutes to get there from Schuman station and as the shop is located in the station you don't even need to face the crowds on the street.

Dry cleaners

The nearest dry cleaners to Schuman is Les Family's Elegance on Rue Stevin (while walking from the Berlaymont, go left at Kitty O'Sheas for about a minute and you'll see it on your right). It's open on Monday from 11h to 17h and Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays from 11h to 18h30. It's closed on Wednesdays and at the weekend.

Book shops

If you're looking for English language bookshops.... Most bookshops have an English language section. There's also a Waterstones on Boulevard Anspach which is like every other Waterstones on the planet.

"There's a second-hand one I really like in Chatelain called Nijinski, it's on Rue du Page." - Nora Delaney

Tips about working in the EU institutions



NOTE: this is largely about the Commission stage at the moment. If you have comments to add about the other stages in the system, we'd love to hear from you.

Don't worry about the language thing. In your first few days, one of the first things you'll probably notice is that many other people on your stage, and those who work in the Commission, are simply superb at languages – a trait that us Irish don't really have, truth be told. The main languages that the European system uses are French, English and German – you'll find that the bulk of the work is done in the first two, so think about it this way, you've at least got one of the working languages. If you have some French, have a stab, it goes a long way as people do appreciate it. Even if it is to say, "Sorry, my French is not great, would you mind if we spoke in English?"

TIP:

If you do have to find explanations for words in other languages try the Interactive Terminology for Europe portal which can be accessed through www.europa.eu. This can translate words from any MS language into another. The direct URL is: <http://iate.europa.eu/iatediff/SearchByQueryLoad.do;jsessionid=9ea7991c30d845e04695870a4668b265e72417f503a8.e3iLbNeKc3mSe3aNbxuQa3iPbi0?method=load>

It is well worth keeping up on your languages. Take one of the many evening classes that are run to help you out. Get a teacher you like – many people teach differently, just like you probably learn in a different way too.

Simple thing is, don't let any concern you have about the strength of your languages in any way hold you back - you're not the first person to not have two or three languages on your stage, and you won't be the last.

Remember there are other institutions and that Irish people work there too. When you've got your stage, sometimes, it's easy to forget that there are other types of stages around Brussels and that Irish people have got places on them too. For example, each MEP usually has a stagiaire for some, or all, of their annual term over there and they can give you a really different perspective of the EU system. The European Economic and Social Committee also has stage opportunities. So, it's well worth picking up the phone.

Pick up the phone and use it. There are two key pieces of technology that will be on your desk when you have a stage – a computer and a phone. Funnily enough, the reports we hear back from the stage is that people certainly use the first, but seem to ignore the last a little too often. This is probably to do with the language thing. Our advice is don't fear the phone. Use it. You're more likely to get a quicker answer than firing off an email and hoping for the best. If it helps at all, rehearse the call in your head before. Do this a few times and then you'll get used to it. It's just a phone. Use it.

Commission DGs are all quite different. Not all DGs are based in the main Commission building, the Berlaymont. In fact, a lot of DGs are not. So be prepared for your office to be out a little from the centre of European work, the Rond Pont Schuman.

http://www.cc.cec/pers_admin/building_bxl/list/index_fr.cfm shows the addresses of all the Commission buildings.

There's a list started in European Movement Ireland with names of people who have done the stage in each DG, so if you're interested in finding out what your DG is really like, then contact the office at +353.1.662.5815 and we'll give you a name for you to have a chat with. To whet your appetite, the following pages give you some stagiaires' thoughts on their stage experience.

Aislinn, DG Translation

“If you are an Irish stagiaire in DGT, you are more than likely either working in Aonad na Gaeilge or in the Web translation unit. Both of these units are situated a bit out of the city centre on Rue de Geneve in Evere. It’s a bit of a catch 22 accommodation-wise. You can live out near the office and have lovely lie-ins but in my opinion it’s preferable to live elsewhere and commute a little bit. You will learn to hate the bus but your social life will thank you for it :) Besides the lovely DGT itself, there really isn’t much else out there. Just be careful not to end up living in a beautiful house on the other side of the city centre. This would mean you’d learn to hate a few different buses which is never a good thing.

As the DGT is quite far away from the other EU buildings, you’ll find that you get to know the other DGT stagiaires quite well and that, perhaps, the role of Porte Parole (stagiaire spokesperson of your team, elected the first day) is quite an important one. Meet up in the canteen in G6 for lunch and rendez-vous in the cafeteria for tea whenever you’re not slaving away at your desk. Cora de Paor and Caoimhe Ní Shúilleabháin from Aonad na Gaeilge organise céilí dancing class once a week at lunch time, a great way to work off the plat du jour; and ask your colleagues about ciorcal comhrá and the likes (the DGT is about all using your languages after all!).”

Cian, Legal Service

“The service has traditionally been very Francophone – though it varies from team to team – but don’t let the language thing worry you. They are happy to have native English speakers and proofreading will probably be a big part of your job. Also, in my team at least, while meetings are nominally run in French, the administrators will respond in either English or French, whichever they feel more comfortable.

There is a 5-a-side football every Thursday in a local sports hall for which there is a longstanding tradition that stagiaires do not have to pay to play but are supposed to run more and score more goals.

The service tries to ensure that everyone gets to a hearing in Luxembourg. It’s three hours away, and trains conveniently run from Schuman. If you need to stay over, you are entitled to €90 accommodation expenses ONCE. If you go a second time you have to pay for everything yourself. There is a cheap (€20) and clean place called Luxembourg City Hostel located relatively near the Courts as well.”

Peter, DG ECFIN

“DG ECFIN is in Beaulieu, a Commission complex situated in a quiet south-western suburb of Brussels. When they were constructed, the initial intention was to use some of the buildings for a shopping centre, but that fell through and the buildings were converted for use as office space. Beaulieu is largely closed plan and many stagiaires can expect to have their own office or share with just one other person.

Although Beaulieu is located a considerable distance from the city centre and the European district, there are excellent transport links which mean that stagiaires located there need not be isolated from the larger Schumann/stagiaire community. The primary metro connection to Beaulieu is the number 5 metro line (direction Herrmann-Debroux -if you are leaving from anywhere other than Herrmann-Debroux). Although there is a stop named Beaulieu, depending on your building, it may actually be quicker to access the offices from the Demi metro stop.

For those working in Beaulieu, the radial pattern of the public transport system does mean that the choice of location for accommodation is very important as changing metros or buses can be time consuming and annoying. So, if you’re based in Beaulieu, it’s better to live somewhere serviced by the number 5 metro line or a bus service that goes there. Thus, the city centre areas, and those around Place Flagey, are best due to their proximity to Brussels’ various amenities and direct links to work through the metro and the 71 bus line. The 71 bus line stops at Delta which is one stop before Beaulieu and is walkable. Not many stagiaires choose to live in Beaulieu itself.”

Emilie, DG JLS

“DG Justice, Freedom and Security (or JLS as it is most commonly known) is situated right beside Place Luxembourg. Though not in the true EU epicentre (eg Schuman), there is plenty going on around the building that allows you to still feel in the heart of EU Affairs. With the Parliament a stone’s throw away, and the common watering hole of European fonctionnaires (Plux) 1 minute from the exit, DG JLS is ideal for any stagiaire.

With Justice, Freedom and Security constantly growing in importance in the EU, you are sure to find JLS very interesting and fast paced. Since the DG is not so large, the stagiaires are given a lot of responsibility and are included in their units’ work at all times. Stagiaires tend to share an office with another stagiaire but you can also be lucky to get your own, depending on space in your particular unit. Another bonus of a smaller DG is that all functionaries seem to know each other quite well, which creates a very close-knit and sympathetic work environment.

Though there is no canteen in DG JLS, the Research canteen further up Rue Luxembourg is close by and most stagiaires tend to congregate there at lunchtime. The Berlaymont and the Council are only about a 10-minute walk which is quite handy if you have any business to do around Schuman.

Both French and English are spoken in the DG with the division seeming to be equal. All unit meetings seem to be held in both languages depending on the speaker’s preference. The DG also organises Yoga and Pilates classes twice a week which is a nice way to meet other stagiaires and functionaries. The stagiaires also organise football, teaming up with another DG such as RELEX.

Regarding transport, the closest metro station is Trone, though there are also plenty of buses stopping at Place Lux. If you are lucky enough to live in Ixelles or Eterbeek, the DG can be walking distance away which is of course beneficial to your morning routine!

All in all, DG JLS is a very motivating and fast paced environment. All the projects that are going on are vital for the development of Justice Freedom and Security so you can be guaranteed to be working in areas that are constantly in the news. This can make you feel like you are really doing something in the world of the European Union.”

If you don't get a job, help create one for yourself.

A stage will be a very boring experience if you don't have anything to do - and the type of work that stagiaires get really varies from person to person and unit to unit. It's useful to bear in mind, while this is your first stage, it will not be the first time that your supervisor has a stagiaire - they've probably managed one for the last six months and the Monday after you finish, will be welcoming in another.

But there is a lot you can do to maximise your stage. If you have no work, pick up the phone or call into someone's office and ask for some. Ask them what they do, why they got into the Commission and if they need any help with anything. People are generally pleased when you show an interest in their work so don't be afraid to ask them about it or ask to get involved.

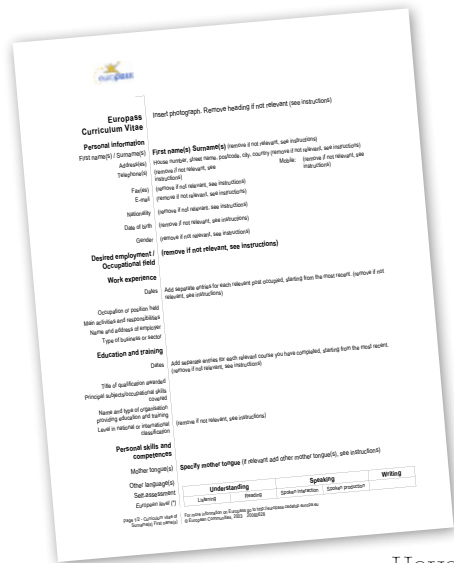


TIP: There is a daily conference held in the Salle de Presse of the Berlaymont every day at midday. You can go it in the Berlaymont or follow it live over the phone by ringing 02.29.61.500 for an English version. As the Commission meets every Wednesday morning, the press conference that afternoon is regarded as the most important. Commissioners will often come down to speak on specific issues alongside the general spokesperson. These conferences can vary from being quite interesting to being mind-numbingly boring depending on what topic you are interested in, but it may be worth your while to go along.



TIP: It's a good idea to keep an eye out for interesting conferences that are going on in Brussels. If you do find something that is interesting, ask your supervisor if it's alright for you to go and that you'll write something up about it. Helpful websites to find out what's on are;

http://www.ceps.be/events_upcoming
<http://www.epc.eu/>



countries usually group together) put on a party for charity, or fun, while also giving people a flavour of their nationality and traditions.

An Irish stage party has not been held for a number of years, but it has definitely been done before. It is a bit of work, but it's also a bit of fun. Again, contact European Movement Ireland about this as they should be able to put you in contact with some people who have run the Irish stage party many moons ago.

Have your CV with you, just in case. Some stagiaires have been asked to bring in a copy of their CV to send around the other members of their team. Copies of your CV have also been requested for involvement in certain Commission training days. It's a good idea to have a version with you on a USB stick – also because you never know when a good job opportunity may suddenly appear....

Work out early enough if you want to host a stage party. Basically, this is a long-standing tradition of the stage programme – a country or a group of countries (eg. the Nordic

Know that you are entitled to two free days as part of your Commission stage. Yes, it's true so take them if you want to. Talk to your supervisor about this and check with the Stage Co-ordination office. And if you're on the winter stage, you'll usually get roughly a week off at Christmas.

When you get paid in the Commission. If you work in the Commission, your salary is going to be €1047 a month. Factor in rent and you'll most likely be lucky if you break even. You get paid around the 15th or 16th of every month except in the first when you get paid towards the end of the month.

Institutional food and how you'll learn to eat it.

Commission stagiaires can eat in the Council canteen if you want to. This is recommended as the fare is usually a bit better than what you'll find in the Commission. Commission stagiaires can also eat in the Parliament canteen but only after 13h30. According to reports, there are better choices there than in the Berlaymont canteen. The food varies from day to day but, generally speaking, it's not of a very high standard and, some might say, the Plat du Jour is of a particularly poor standard.

There are also cafes in most Commission buildings, including three in the Berlaymont itself. You can go to the exclusive 11th floor café if you have someone who works in the Cabinet (only Cabinet people are allowed above the 9th floor of the BERL) to let you in – though again, the jury is out on the food there.

What is the Plat du Jour?

Normally, the Plat du Jour consists of some sort of miscellaneous meat and vegetables covered in some sort of sauce. Quite often you'll discover that the miscellaneous meat is rabbit or something and you'll wish you never asked. As ignorance is bliss, you may consider it best to ignore the plat du jour altogether. However, it should be borne in mind that, as stagiaires, we get a discount which means that we can get coffee and a bowl of soup for €3.37 every day. This is a really good deal and saves you a lot of money. Also the soup is usually good and will wash out the taste of the rabbit or whatever. Do note that there is no discount on the vegetarian plat du jour.



TIP: Going for a coffee after lunch is pretty much expected of everyone. A coffee is normally around a €1, slightly more expensive if it's the better quality Illy coffee.

What happens if...

...you get sick.

Phone your stage advisor immediately (this is the person who you are assigned to on your first day). After two days' absence, you have to have a sick certificate from a doctor. When you return to your office, you have to send the original sick certificate to the main traineeship office in Madou, care of Judith Willemaers (who takes care of Irish Stagaires - contact details are in the back of this document). Remember, it's very important that you keep a copy to give to the Stage co-ordinator (not your advisor) in your DG. You will meet the Stage co-ordinator on your first day but probably never again.



A handy number to have is the Community Health Service Helpline which will assist you to find an English speaking Doctor in your area. - No. 02.648.40.14.

...you need to leave the stage.

Leaving the stage is not a problem. You may not like it or, more commonly, you may get a full time job that requires you to start before the stage ends. If you have to go you just need to give three weeks notice to your advisor and the Bureau de Stage, so they can hopefully find another person to take up the stage in your place.

....if you lose your passport.

Contact the Irish Embassy in Belgium and they will help you. Contact details are at the back of this book. (Note this is different to the Irish Permanent Representation to the EU, who will probably point you in the direction of the Irish Embassy in Belgium. The broad distinction is that the Permanent Representation deals with the European Union, the Irish Embassy deals with Irish people living in Belgium)



General tips about living in Brussels

Learn to love your public transport. Note that in Belgium, and Brussels in particular, they are BIG on public transport. You can get anywhere in Brussels without a car and, as such, it is vital you use this service properly if you want to save money. Whilst the cost of tickets for the public transport system are nowhere near as extortionate as London for example, it is a good idea to get what is called an 'abonnement'. This is a monthly public transport pass for the duration of your stay here. With it, you can travel anytime, anywhere on any metro, bus or tram run by

transport system is based on 'the honour system' - there are no barriers to get in and out of the stations, rather it is your responsibility to find a card machine inside the station and endorse your ticket every time you travel.



"It may well save you over €50 a week in taxi fares depending on how much of a night owl you are!" - Dan

STIB - the main transport company in Brussels (www.stib.be). In order to get an abonnement you need to go to one of several Bootik de ventes located at major metro stops such as Roodebeek, Porte de Namur etc, with your passport and €30. It will take you about an hour or more to get it as the queues are sometimes crazy but once you have it, you'll (a) save well over €100 per month on travel expenses and (b) can easily renew your monthly pass at any kiosk in the same time it takes to buy a normal 'une voyage' ticket. Note for visitors and friends who come to Brussels - if you buy a regular metro ticket, it will become valid for one hour on any mode of transport once inserted into the card machine at the entrance to every metro. You'll notice after a while that the Belgian

stop in stages at night. For more information you should check the relevant timetable on the www.stib.be website. The same is also true for trams. Nightbuses were introduced in Brussels City Centre a couple of years ago and, currently, there are about 8 bus routes operating from the city centre which cover a wide range of communes. Again, it is best to consult the STIB website for the most current timetable as they may have changed. There is also a new feature introduced by STIB for every stagiaire, Irish or otherwise. Essentially, it is a STIB taxi service. It operates at set prices after the public transport system has stopped. It works by collecting you from a STIB stop (bus or tram) and dropping you to any other STIB stop (bus, tram or metro) in Brussels.

To carry or not to carry...your passport. "From my experience, as someone who has lived in Brussels for over twenty years, the issue of passports and IDs generally becomes very prominent in certain circumstances - firstly when going out, and secondly when you travel around Belgium. It is true that national law requires you to have your passport/ID on you at all times but the reality is, if you have some form of photo ID on you, you'll be fine." Dan Galvin

Crossing the street is a serious business. Note that jay-walking is taken curiously seriously in Brussels, and that you can be fined. "Remember the old adage of looking twice before you cross the street....they are crazy, lunatic drivers here!" Aine

House parties are a great way to save money as is communal cooking. The city is also very compact and quite easy to walk around so you can try to cut down on your transport bill by walking everywhere, although this does depend on where you live and work.

"Invest in a water-filter because Brussels water is a bit nasty!"

Try to be in Grand Place at 10.30pm some night to see the light and music display.



Meet Madame PeePee. Madame PeePee is the lady who sits outside and looks after the toilets. She has a saucer in front of her into which you are supposed to give 30 or 40 cent. This is normally her main source of income from her evening's work and it is a small price to pay for having clean toilets. While you don't have to pay, it is pretty bad not to. "A good rule of thumb is that when you start asking Madame PeePee for credit, it's probably time to go home."



There's a GAA club in Brussels. Belgium GAA is one of the largest GAA clubs in Europe catering for men's and ladies football, hurling and camogie. They are the 2008 European county men's football champions, while the hurlers and the ladies footballers have also wrapped up the 2009 championships. They train from March in Parc Cinquantenaire until the end of season tournament in Maastricht at the end of October. Check out www.belgiumgaa.com for more details.



Most museums are shut on Mondays and public holidays. There's a good new Magritte museum that's just open too.



Eating

Here are some cheap, decent places/romantic places. Think the Brussels version of Zaytoon or Hillbillies and the nice places you save for when your parents visit (and most likely will pay!)

Maison Antoinnes, Place Jourdan, Etterbeek. More than just a regular friterie, Chez Antoine's is an institution. It has 40 different flavours of sauce and some amazing chips. No seats but you are allowed to eat your chips both in and outside many of the bars and cafés around Place Jourdan. Be prepared to queue every time you go, and often for quite a long time (especially on Sundays).

Musical Instruments Museum Terrasse Café, Old England Store, Near Place Royale. The museum

has a rooftop terrace with excellent view of Brussels and very nice, but pretty expensive, food. Be prepared for death stares from the waitresses, and provocatively bad service, if you have the cheek to order just a coffee.

Fin de Siecle on Rue des Chartreux (beside the Bourse). It's a nice place to bring your parents to, but not so nice that that's the only way you can go. They do great Flemish dishes for a good price!

Chez Vincent, on Rue des Dominicains, just off Restaurant Street. Arguably the best steak in Brussels! This is a great spot if you fancy splashing out a little, and you get the buzz of the touristy Restaurant Street without the rubbish food.

Going out

Contrary to what some people might say, you will quickly find that Brussels is not boring, at least in terms of going out.

To buy the Action Card or not to buy the Action Card? The Action Card is a card the stage committee sells for around €20 at the beginning of your stage. It gives you certain discounts and deals in various bars, museums and for some trips they organise. It's also how they fund their activities. Despite all this, it doesn't give you big discounts at all and if you're not planning on going to many events, you probably shouldn't waste your money on it.

TIP: Beware of Belgian beer strength...a more gradual approach is advised until one is immune to its stronger effects!



Note that De Valeras on Place Flagey is supposedly the best place to watch international football, rugby matches, GAA, the Heineken Cup, and the Premiership.

“As you will most likely be new to Brussels, the allure of homemade Irish pubs may be too strong to resist. There are other attractions in Brussels, most of which are located either in the city centre or around Cimetière d’Ixelle. However, do be cautious when planning an outing to a new venue. There are a number of very cool and very enjoyable bars and clubs scattered around Belgium that you will enjoy, but you must also realise that they may not be in very nice neighbourhoods (eg. ‘The FUSE Nightclub’ in St. Gilles). Therefore, it is always a good idea to plan a visit to these places during the day (especially in the case of clubs) and/or in the evening (in the case of bars). By doing this you will be aware of the area and, if you or your friends decide that you don’t like the area, you’ll still have the rest of the evening to get back to the city centre while public transport is fully functional” Dan

Another handy website for bar and restaurant reviews is www.whatupin.be and it's always a good idea to check out the newspaper, Le Soir, or the free sheet, L'Agenda, to see what's going on.

“The greatest trick Brussels’ nightlife ever pulled is convincing the world it doesn’t exist.” Joe

Gigs

As Brussels is at a crossroads between Amsterdam, London, Paris and Cologne, you’ll find that you get a lot more bands playing here than in Dublin. There are some really good venues like Cirque Royale, Botanique and Ancienne Belgique. A good website for listing of concerts, shows etc is www.agenda.be. What's best of all is that the ticket prices are considerably lower than back home so definitely keep an eye out for shows.



Outside the Eurobubble

It may surprise you to hear (even after a few weeks in Brussels) that Brussels is located in a country called Belgium which is located just outside the Eurobubble. While the countryside may not be hugely scenic, there are several beautiful towns and places of historical interest all very close to Brussels and relatively cheap to visit.

Invest in a GoPass which is available to people up until the age of 25. This entitles you to 10 rail tickets for anywhere in Belgium for only €50. This works out cheaper than buying individual tickets. If you are 26 or over it is called a RailPass and is €70.



Should I stay...

A view from a former stagiaire who got a job in Brussels.

“Although a certain number of stagiaires have always stayed on in Brussels for work after their stage, this number will surely increase in light of the recession in Ireland. There are plenty of opportunities for work in Brussels and often in very interesting areas which you simply couldn't get work in elsewhere.

The downside is the bad conditions young newly-qualified workers have to accept, namely pay or lack thereof! Unlike Ireland, unless you have 1 to 2 years' work experience most private companies will insist on taking you on an internship basis for anything from 3 months to a year, or even more. Many of these internships are unpaid, the best ones pay a little more than the Commission stage (law firms are the exception here. They often take on unqualified law graduates as stagiaires for six months to a year, but they're usually relatively well-paid.)

The thing about low-paying internships is that they're often the only way into an organisation or particular sector. If you can find one which pays enough to break even, it's worth it for a few months as a way of getting good experience, making contacts and hopefully being offered a job after! The other thing which stands out is the quality of candidate these jobs attract. It might seem crazy to an Irish person in their late twenties/early thirties with Degrees, Masters, even PhDs and years of internships under their belt to apply for a 3 month unpaid post, but it's utterly normal for many Italians, Germans and other nationalities.

Before I paint too bleak a picture though, it is worth remembering how well-received Irish graduates/stagiaires are in most companies and organisations. It's hard to overstate the advantage of being a native English speaker. In addition Irish University Degrees are held in pretty high regard, graduates tend to be young and have a reputation for being hard-working enthusiastic and, generally, just well liked. In the networking capital of Europe, traits like that often really appeal to employers!

As for finding a job, often the hardest part is finding out that the job exists. Signing up to an agency is one way to do it eg Eurobrussels or Start People. The problem is, because these are so popular there are always big numbers of applicants for every decent offer. The online EU paper, www.euractiv.com, is another good source of job advertisements. It can be the case that companies and organisations will only advertise on their own website which means you have to already be aware that they're there. If you're looking at lobbying either for private companies or NGOs, one way to get a comprehensive list of people to contact is to check the Commission's registry of lobbyists and then check their individual websites. Even if there's no position advertised, it's often worth sending in a CV stating your interest. The same goes for MEPs, think-tanks and large companies. For the latter it could be worth looking at every large company which has a base in Brussels (everyone from Panasonic to Levi's to Toyota has an office here) and seeing if they need people in their public affairs or legal section or whatever other area you plan to go into.

As for eligibility for jobs, many advertisements, though not all, will stipulate a Master's degree in a relevant area. Most will look for more than one language, usually English and French. That said, more often than not the office language tends to be English. It's also pretty common to see a requirement of 'experience in a community institution' which is when the stage really reveals its use! It can take a while to find something interesting so it's usually not a bad idea to start looking before your stage ends. Also, feel free to ask officials in your unit for any suggestions or recommendations. They will probably have contacts and, in my experience, most are more than happy to make an introduction and usually give you a plug as well.

The problem with the Brussels job scene is that it's a buyer's market so you do have to sell yourself and don't sell yourself short. The opportunities and jobs here are impossible to find in most other cities. You just have to keep an eye out for what's going on. Keep yourself open to suggestions and new people and there's every chance of finding a perfect job".

Nora Delaney, former stagiaire

Useful websites

www.europa.eu/quick-links/job-seekers/index_en.htm

www.europa.eu/epso/index_en.htm

www.eurobrussels.com/job_search.php

www.euractiv.com/en/HomePage#

....or should I go (home)

Previous stagiaires have gone on to work in business consultancies, law firms, civil service and a variety of NGOs and international organisations based in Ireland. Regardless of where you end up, we hope you stay involved in Europe. If you do go home, there are two main ways you can do this:

Get involved in European Movement Ireland. This is the campaigning organisation in Ireland. They run a number of thought-provoking campaigns throughout the year, lead a number of education and outreach programmes, build a network of other pro-Europeans and communicate Europe to the people in a jargon-free way. There are many, many ways you can get involved with European Movement Ireland and they would be more than happy to have you. First thing you can do is help with the next edition of this book... Contact us at www.europeanmovement.ie or give the office a call at +353.1.662.5815.

Become a member of the Institute for International and European Affairs. The IIEA is Ireland's only European and international affairs think tank. It has a number of speakers on a range of topics throughout the year. Of particular note for Stagiaires would be their Young Professionals Network. www.iiea.com

Calendar & important dates

1 January - New Years day

5 April - Easter Monday

1 May - May day

24 May - Whit Monday

21 July - Belgian National holiday

15 August - Assumption of Mary

1 November - All Saints Day

11 November - Armistice Day

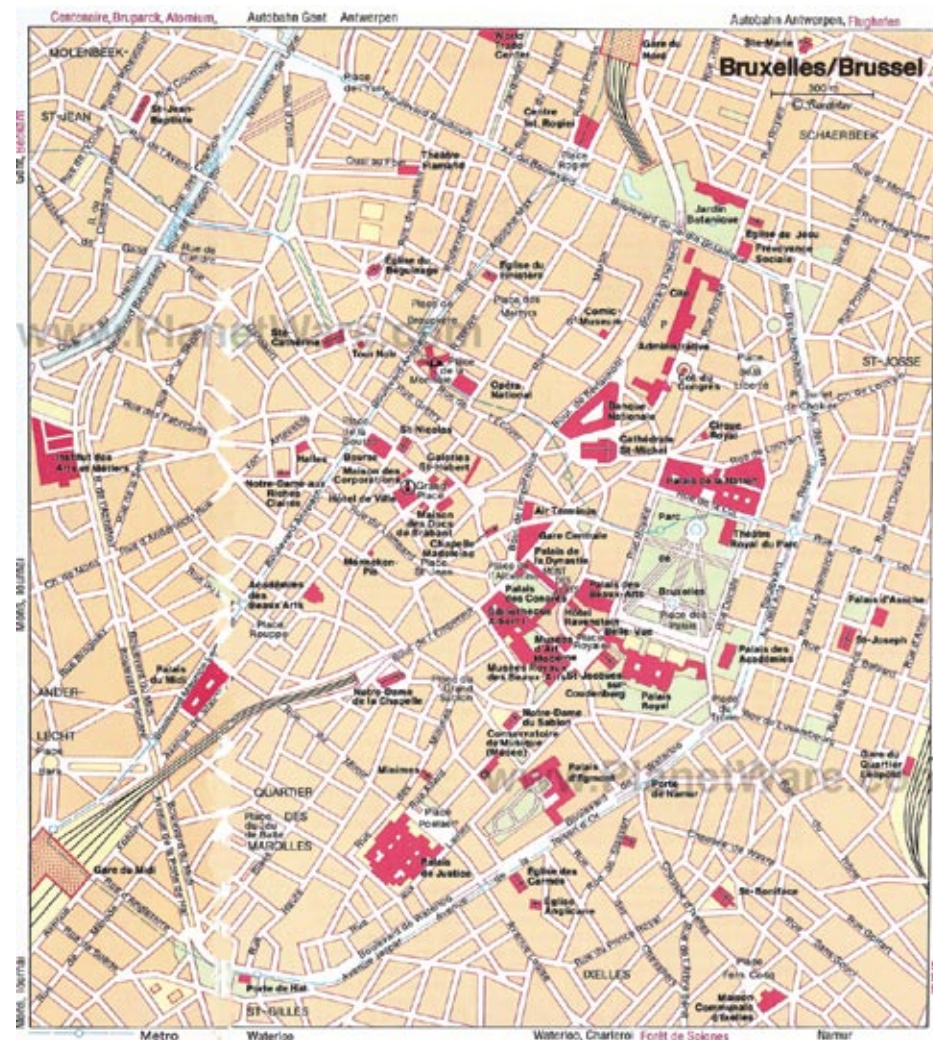
25 December - Christmas Day

26 December - Bank holiday

Useful numbers & websites.

European Commission	
Judith WILLEMAERS Person in charge of Irish stagiaires	EAC-STAGES-DESK10@ec.europa.eu +32.2.295.74.29
Christian MEYER Works in Bureau des stages, formerly in charge of Irish Stagiaires	Christian.Meyer@ec.europa.eu +32.2.299.91.75
Commission Traineeships Office website	www.cc.cec/stages/index_en.html
Commission stagiaire website	www.stagecommittee.org
European Parliament	
All depends on what MEP you are interested in working with! Check out all their information on the Irish website for the European Parliament.	www.europarl.ie
European Parliament Stagiaire Association	www.epstage.eu/news.php
Embassy of Ireland, Brussels	
His Excellency Brian NASON Ambassador	Chaussee d'Etterbeek / Etterbeekse Steenweg 180 (5th Floor) Bruxelles 1040 Brussels +32.2.235.6676
Niall BRADY First Secretary	www.embassyofireland.be
Sean O' hAODHA Second Secretary	
Irish Permanent Representation to the EU	
His Excellency Rory MONTGOMERY Ambassador	89/93 Rue Froissart, 1040 Brussels, Belgium +32.2.230.8580
Geraldine BYRNE-NASON Deputy Ambassador	www.irelandrepbrussels.be

Map of Brussels



For your notes



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