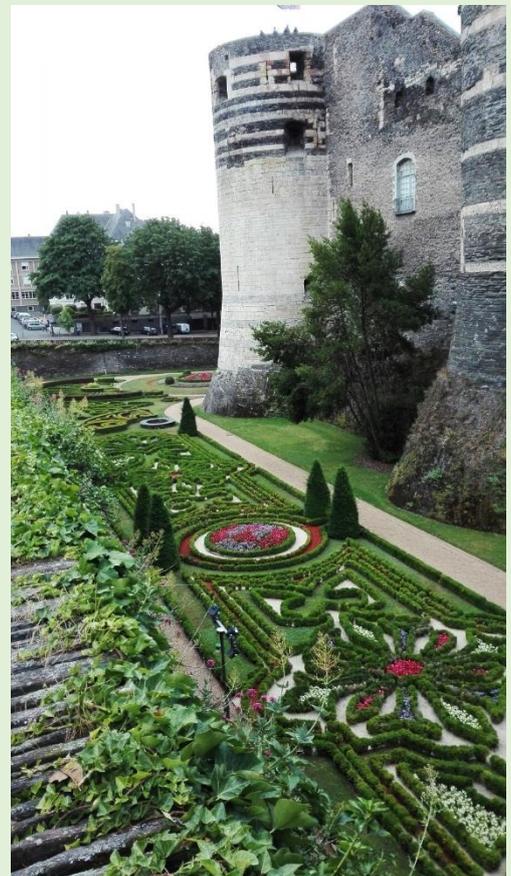


Research Summer School, France 2017

During my second year, I felt the need to understand if I really wanted to pursue a career in the scientific research. I am in love with the idea of being a researcher but, at the same time, I know that I want to make a difference in people's and especially children's life, not only by researching in a lab, but also by working directly with them. I still had my third-year research project to complete during the summer, which would have helped me to explore more what being a researcher looked like. At the same time, I wanted to listen first-hand from the experience of researchers coming from around the world and gain a broader knowledge on topics that I had studied in my second year and that I came to love the most. It was for these reasons that I decided to apply to the research summer school in Angers, France. The summer school programme promised to show to the participants the links between fundamental sciences and clinical research and was directed to medical and biological students which were thinking of applying for a PhD.

On the 25th of June, I left London to begin this new experience in Angers, that would have lasted for two weeks. Thanks to the cultural and social activities organised by the university, we were also able to get to know the city and the culture of the place. Angers is one of the beautiful cities present in the French region of the Pays de la Loire, famous for its majestic castles. For everyone passionate about history it is worth pointing out that Angers is the cradle of the Plantagenet dynasty!



The river Maine runs through the city and it was there that we had an afternoon kayak session with the students of the other summer schools. Angers is a quiet city where to live, full of parks and cycle lanes that we used to arrive to the university campus during the week. At the end of the two weeks we had a social challenge in one of the parks where all the summer schools competed for a final prize.



Angela Colangelo, Medical Genetics

Angers was not the only city that we visited. The social programme, in fact, involved two day trips in Nantes and Paris. I had never been to the *ville lumière* before and I remained fascinated by it. We had great fun walking through its *boulevards* and we enjoyed a cruise in one of its *bateaux mouches*.



Before arriving to Paris and Nantes we visited the international research institutes of Oniris and Généthon. Oniris, based in Nantes, comprises a veterinary school and research labs which are involved mostly in animal, public health and food science. During the welcome lecture, the researchers emphasised the central mission of the research facility, namely the expansion of the collaboration and communication between human, animal and environmental research (WHO “One Medicine, One Health” initiative). They also gave us a lecture about food safety in Europe and the regulations present in the organic food market. On the other hand, the Généthon, based in Paris, is focused on gene therapy research to treat rare diseases, mainly neuromuscular diseases. They showed us how they use animal models, specifically canine models, to test their gene therapy techniques for muscular dystrophies (MD). I had the opportunity in this tour to gain a better understanding of the processes that bring to the approval of drugs and of the various steps involved in clinical trials.

These two visits to the research institutions together with a rich programme of workshops and oral presentations gave me awareness about new subjects such as nanomedicine and neurogeriatrics, that I had never studied before. Topics covered during the lectures included different research and medical fields: cell and molecular biology, genetics, pharmacology, medical imaging, space medicine research, mitochondrial diseases, physiology. One of the lectures that I enjoyed the most was about foetal programming and was held at the maternity department of the university hospital.

In summary, I can say that the course broadened my knowledge about natural sciences and helped me develop presentation skills that I will need for the completion of my degree and my future career. In the research summer school, there were around 25 students coming from all around the world. I am very interested to see where everybody that was in the summer school is going to be in the future and who they are going to become. During these two weeks, I have made memories that I will cherish for the rest of my life.