

Elective Report – Facilitated PHEM Elective with WAS
Ruby Bolton, University of Leeds

2026 WAS Facilitated Pre-Hospital Elective – Ruby Bolton, University of Leeds

I would highly recommend the elective with the Welsh Ambulance Service, facilitated by the Faculty of Pre-Hospital Care! I completed mine over six weeks between July and September in 2026.

I applied for the elective with three main aims: to gain more pre-hospital and emergency medicine (PHEM) exposure, to develop a better understanding of what it would be like to work in this area, and to build confidence around assessing and managing acutely unwell patients. I feel like I achieved all three of these aims and would recommend the elective to anyone with similar personal or academic interests.

The elective timetable

Averaging around 40 hours per week, there was plenty of opportunity to get to know the teams, get used to using the kit and attend a wide variety of call-outs. I was primarily based with the Carmarthen team who cover a huge area, encompassing both rural and urban areas, including Swansea. During the elective, I had the opportunity to spend time on the emergency ambulances, with the Cymru High Acuity Response Units (CHARU) who respond to the more urgent calls, and the Advanced Paramedic Practitioners (APPs) who attend to patients with more complex medical problems.

I really enjoyed that my timetable followed the paramedics' normal shift pattern, with three to four 12-hour shifts, followed by three to four days off. It meant that I could really get stuck in on the days I was in, but then also had some time to enjoy my hobbies over summer before final year. Carmarthenshire and the surrounding area was a beautiful place to explore both by car to places in Eryri and Bannau Brycheiniog National Parks but also by train to Ferryside or Tenby.

I immediately felt welcomed by everyone at Carmarthen Station and felt very supported to get involved with patient care rather than solely be an observer which I feel really helped me get the most out of this elective.

Learning about a career in PHEM

Alongside gaining PHEM exposure directly, the elective was also a valuable opportunity to speak to lots of different professionals working in the field I am interested in pursuing myself. It was particularly interesting to hear about people's different routes into the specialty and the many career paths available. During the elective I appreciated some of the challenges of the job such as long wait times at the emergency department (ED), managing the demand and public expectations of the ambulance service and responding to challenging patients

sometimes as a solo crew. However, speaking to so many people who remained passionate about their work and hearing about their different routes into the specialty reinforced my own interest and motivation to continue pursuing a pre-hospital career.

One of my biggest takeaways from the elective was a much greater appreciation of how much paramedics do for patients before they arrive in ED. The contrast between the brightly lit hospital setting with access to blood tests and scans that I am familiar with, compared to trying to assess, cannulate and extract a patient stuck between furniture, on the floor of an unhygienic home or outside in a public area, was striking. It made me appreciate the additional challenges faced by pre-hospital clinicians and the circumstances in which they have to make time critical clinical decisions in. This is something I will keep in mind during future ED placements when I am part of a team receiving patients from the ambulance service.

Preparing for foundation training

As well as exploring a personal interest and potential career path, I also found the elective a hugely useful opportunity to improve some key skills in preparation for beginning as a resident doctor in a year's time. This included cannulating unwell patients, A-E assessment, wound closure and ECG interpretation. One job we attended particularly highlighted the importance of a thorough clinical assessment to me. We were called to a young man who's friends reported was drunk and 'needed to be taken to rehab'. However, on assessment, we realised he was FAST positive and was subsequently rushed to hospital as a stroke pre-alert. This reinforced for me the importance of combining scene context, history and examination rather than relying solely on one or the other. It also reminded me not to immediately rule out differentials if the patient's characteristics, such as age, don't fit the classic textbook description of a condition.

Being involved in the identification and acute management of many conditions I had only read about was eye-opening and I feel I have gained much more confidence both in recognising and assessing unwell patients.

Other opportunities

There were also lots of opportunities to see how other emergency teams operate. For example, we attended a multi-agency call-out searching for a boy thought to be in the river. This gave me an insight into how the different emergency services work together and the roles of each team. Depending on when you do the elective, there are also opportunities to get involved with things such as ECG training courses, training days with HEMS or the fire service and ride-outs with the MEDSERVE voluntary teams. I was even recruited into the rounders team for our station, competing against other local crews in their annual competition (we won)!

Overall, the elective gave me a much broader understanding of what working in a pre-hospital setting can look like and strengthened my interest in PHEM. I feel my elective experience will go on to shape what opportunities and careers I choose to pursue in the future. However, it will also benefit me in the short-term too as it has provided me with practical experience and skills that I will take forward into my final year and foundation training. I would thoroughly recommend the elective to anyone interested in PHEM or wanting to develop their skills in a different clinical environment.

Thank you to the Faculty of Pre-Hospital Care, particularly the Elective Lead, for facilitating my elective and making the opportunity possible. I am also incredibly grateful to everyone I spent time with on shift. Everyone made me feel welcome and were always keen to get me involved and share their knowledge and skills with me. Finally, thank you to Steve Bowles (WAST Senior Paramedic) who organised my timetable and ensured that I had such a varied and rewarding experience throughout the elective.

