

Academia exchange programme

Monday 10th May 04

The first day started with a short walk from the hotel across to the Ministry of Labour. All the participants met in the lobby. There were 16 participants from the following countries

3 England
2 Greece
1 Malta
2 Hungary
2 Spain
2 Finland
2 France
1 Italy
1 Czech Republic

The first day, we spent the entire day sat in a meeting room, while numerous officials from the ministry came and gave us various pieces of information. Prior to this happening the Participants were asked to introduce themselves to our hosts and each other and give a brief description of their respective roles.

Summary

Population of Norway 4,000,000

There are 3273 compulsory schools in Norway and 505 upper schools. 4 universities, 26 university colleges, 6 specialised universities, 2 national institutes of art and 20 recognised private institutions

98% of schools are LEA controlled

Compulsory education is from 6 – 16 years

All preschools catering for children from birth to five (5) charge a fee and are not part of the Ministry of education. 56% of children in this age group attend, shortage of spaces being the main reason.

Pupils with special needs are generally integrated in to mainstream schools. Approximately 6% of pupils in compulsory education are recognised as having special needs. Only 0.5% attends special schools

Norwegians are big believers in “ children will learn when they are ready”. They feel play and socialising are as important as academic study in the early years and only teach reading and writing from the age of six. They did however say this is something they are now looking at revising

Immigrants make up 7% of the school population. The Ministry stated they are moving towards becoming multi-cultural something not everybody has embraced as yet.

More Norwegian families have both parents working these days and the government has responded to this by having, before & after schools clubs in all schools to assist with the working patterns of modern day families, as a lot of people start their working day at 7.00a.m.

95 % of 16 year olds continue in education, as young people 16 –19 are entitled to three (3) years of higher education. So while not compulsory 95% go into further education, work based learning and E2E type programmes. 70% of them will complete their course of study.

Whilst this seems very impressive, the main reason for this is the government has made it very difficult for young people to leave school and find employment, as you have to be eighteen (18) to work in the majority of sectors, including retail. Only places like McDonald's will employ sixteen year olds.

Unemployment rate for academics 2%

There are 5, 800 people registered unemployed, out of these 158 are young people. The participant from Italy said in her country, if you do not work, you don't have any money! There is no unemployment benefit.

The largest group of JSA claimants are from ethnic backgrounds. The ministry put this down to the language barrier preventing many of them from gaining employment

Most people in Norway have a computer, so the job centre emails clients with vacancies, based on their choices, this is apparently very successful. The participant from Finland said they text vacancies to mobiles

Substance abuse is very common in Norway among young people, as is largely responsible for the large number of drop- outs from education. This became more apparent through the programme, as when we visited schools and institutions/organisations working with young people it seems normal for random drug testing to be done. The Ministry also said large numbers of ethnic children are taken out of school and sent to their country of their birth, or the parents birth place, for extended period.

The type of client I work with in my role as personal advisers here (multiple issues) are labelled as being "occupationally handicapped" in Norway!

There is a programme in Norway very similar to our E2E programme. It works on the basis that you do a days training, you get a days pay. I thought this was an excellent idea, rather than the weekly payment we have here, as the young person knows if they turn on that day, at the end of it they will receive their allowance (180 Kroner) 22 Euros. I feel this system would be very successful with my clients.

Another very good initiative is wage subsidies. After vocational training has been completed and the young person is looking for employment or hoping to be taken on by their work placement, employment services will offer to subsidise the young person's wages for up to a year, two year if young person has special needs. This encourages employers to take young people on and is a very successful programme

Careers Guidance

Average age of a careers guidance worker in Norway is fifty-seven (57). Young people not interested in pursuing this, as a career. No real reason given or known!?

Pupils have a right to guidance on education, careers and social matters (Education Act.)

Ten (10) minutes is the average time a young person receives on individual careers guidance in Oslo. (Yr 8-10)

There are careers centres at three (3) of the universities and a few of the university colleges.

Feedback

The day was a very long one, there was little opportunity for the group to spend anytime getting to know each other, as the day consisted of government officials coming into the meeting room and giving us a stream of facts and figures around various subjects. There was a lot of very useful information given, however little opportunity for discussion or to questions the speakers.

I feel more could have been done to have the group become more familiar with each other and it was apparent from our earlier introductions quite a few of the participants had very poor spoken English and it was often very difficult for them to make themselves understood, or understand what was being said.

Tuesday 11th June 04

Another full day a sitting! For the second day we have been sat in meeting rooms while individuals come and give us information about their work and projects. This is going to be the pattern for the day.

Largest group if immigrants in Norway are the Pakistanis

Norway has a follow-up service that tracks all dropouts, from upper secondary schools. They do not have such a service for the primary schools, as for some reason they feel, as primary school is compulsory everyone attends! And they could not understand our questioning this.

Upper secondary schools are in two parts, academic and vocational. It was stated that there was no issues of dropouts within the academic group. The drop-outs came from the vocational programmes, which were usually a two (2) year apprenticeship (10% dropout rate). The reason given for this was that while the young people could cope with the practical aspects, they struggled with the academic side.

Again it was stressed how it was virtually impossible for young people aged sixteen (16) to find work. I questioned this, asking if they did not think, that this policy was unfair, as not all young people in Norway would want to progress to further/higher education and that they were denying opportunities to young people who simply wanted a job. The answer was again to quote that 95% of them go into further education. They seemed unwilling to accept the fact that basically young people had no choice, as they either studied or did nothing.

There are summer programmes run each year to engage young people. They are specifically aimed at young offenders and those likely to offend if not engaged in meaningful activities. They have been proven to be very effective at reducing crime. What was interesting about this was it was voluntary and the young person signs a form agreeing to be worked with. Again it was stressed that majority of young people sign up to the programmes and the reason they are successful is because the young people want to be there and the programmes are young people friendly. Another good Norwegian initiative. Whether it would work in England, I am not sure.

All year ten (10) students have the opportunity to spend three weeks visiting employers. Looking at sixth (6th) forms and doing work experience placements.

Improving the achievements of minorities is high on the government's agenda and reducing the number of ethnic drop-outs. We were told this is a major concern of the government and they planned to address the following issues:

- Ensure that minority language students of pre-school age have a better understanding of the Norwegian language
- To improve the educational achievements of minority language students
- To increase the percentage of minority language students and apprentices who begin and complete upper secondary education.
- To increase the percentage of minority students in higher education
- To improve the Norwegian language skills of minority adults

When asked how they planned to implement this, and what strategies they would use, they were not sure. Also they were unclear of what the situation was like

presently, in terms of numbers this affected, so had no baseline to measure progress. There is an apparent problem in Norway with gathering statistics, as you are not allowed to ask a person their nationality or ethnic origin (it's the law). This obviously has implications in assisting certain groups of people.

Feedback

I found today quite frustrating. I had been given lots of handouts and information from various people, however when these individuals were questioned on the content, they either had no answers or were unsure of what it really meant. Me seeking clarification of issues raised seemed to be taken as challenging what was being said to me and often the people delivering would become quite defensive, when I was merely trying to process the information that was presented. We had gone from a situation on day one, where we being asked how the Norwegian experiences being raised compared to those of the other participants and their respective countries and people were asked to share good practice. Now on day two, we were being told how good the Norwegian strategies and programmes were.

On conclusion of day two it was again apparent that some of the other participants were struggling to understand what was being said (language barriers) some participants have not spoken at all yet.

Wednesday 12 May 2004

Today was a very early start (7.45am). After two days of classroom, we were going to be out and about visiting firstly a school in Oslo offering a practical and vocational alternative for pupils aged 14 – 16. After this we would be visiting an alternative educational programme for young people aged 14-20, who have experienced adjustment difficulties in school or work.

We as a group were now getting closer and chatting in smaller groups. Many of them expressed difficulty in understanding what was being said during the information sessions and expressed their own concerns, as they said they were not comfortable speaking English, so were reluctant to ask questions. What was also happening, was where there were two people from the same country, they would always sit together and did not really mix, with the rest of the group, which was understandable but did not help.

Summary

The first port of call was a school offering alternative curriculum to 14-16 year olds.

- Pupils, who are struggling with mainstream schooling, choose to come to this school. However if they do not follow the rules, they must return to

their mainstream school. The school operates with two days of practical work and three days of theory.

- **Random drug testing done, if they fail a drug test they are expelled**
- **There are 75 pupils and 25 teachers. On our visit to the school we saw one teacher and no pupils! This was very disappointing to me, as three days into the programme we had not been able to meet with any young people to find out how they felt about the programmes and initiatives we were being told about.**
- **Pupils are made to feel privileged to be at the school, as they can only take 75 pupils and apparently demand for places far exceeds this. Hence consequences for not following the rules can be swift and severe, including being expelled for being late to school.**
- **They have a 10% drop-out rate**
- **80% of the pupils are boys**
- **33% of pupils are immigrants**
- **The school is located very close to the sea. So they are heavily involved in boat building and boat maintenance (mechanical). They also take care of ninety (90) boats in the marina. Other vocational options are, film and photography, catering, diving, nature and environment (they take care of all the small Islands that surround the area and the waterways. They are also involved in keeping the rivers and salmon stock in check). Another very good initiative is childcare qualifications. The school is located next to the largest insurance company in Norway. The school provides crèche facilities for the company, while gaining an income for the school and qualifications for the pupils.**
- **Pupils that come to the school, do not apply to the school, they apply to the individual projects the school offers!?! When asked what happens when everyone applies to the same project, we were told this does not happen?**
- **We asked about whether their programmes are reflective of labour market trends, as to equip young people with skills, that there is no market for seemed inappropriate. The response was a look of confusion at the question and no answer was given.**

Leaving the school, we drove for an hour and a half to the Havnoy Foundation, which offers an alternate educational programme to 14-20 year olds, who are experiencing difficulties in adjusting to school/work. This project is also very close to the sea.

It was described to us as a school for pupils who have violent parents or young people with offending behaviour. They are removed from their homes and placed with foster parents in the local area, while they attend the school. The school offers

- **Vocational training in boat building**
- **Work towards independence (skills for life)**

It is a very small project, which can take four (4) young people. They also have four workers, and most on the work done are on a one to one basis. On our visit to the project there were no young people there. They only had one and he had gone to a remote Island with his worker, for a couple of days, to work through some issues he was dealing with.

Like the previous project, this one also was responsible for keeping the Islands and waterways clean in their area from 1st June to 30th august each year.

Before leaving the project, we were taken on a boat ride to view the areas they were responsible for maintaining.

Feedback

A good day out, it was nice to drive along the coastline of Norway. The travelling to the different destinations gave lots of opportunities for me to mix with and chat to the other participants. Again I was very disappointed, not being able to speak with any young people about their programmes.

Had a wonderful lunch and dinner provided by our hosts today.

Thursday 13th June 2004

Today we start off by visiting a once failing school, that has turned around and it used as an example of a successful school now. The school is located in an area with a large population of immigrants and the students came from this area. This was something the school was originally proud of, that they had a successful multi-cultural school, that was out performing the “traditional Norwegian schools. However with their success came demand for places and the principal was very happy to report that he can now pick and choose who gets into his school. What this meant was the school that use to take a lot of immigrants, had suddenly become quite elitist and was cherry picking it’s students and what they found was it was becoming increasingly difficult for ethnic minority students to

get a place at the school. While I admired the immense pride the principal showed in his school, I also felt somewhat disillusioned that he could not see or seem not to worry, that his school had almost stopped being a multi-cultural school, which it initially received recognition for.

After leaving the school, we went to visit a school for refugees and immigrants.

The Rosenhof Adult education Centre

- A free centre for legal immigrants, who have been in the country for at least three (3) months. (This does not apply to refugees)
- 6,000 adults in Oslo receive language and cultural classes in Norwegian
- They also have language classes for 16-19 year olds
- According to your age and ability, you receive between 850 – 3000 hours of free language tuition, as the Norwegians believe that if immigrants are to come to their country, they must learn the language and culture of the country. This is in line with new legislation that will be compulsory as of Sept 04.

New Integration Policy

Aim – To move immigrants from what they see as being passive welfare recipients into active members of society, contributing to the socio-economic development of the country. It is designed to prevent people coming to the country for benefits. They have to participate fully in Norwegian culture/language, for which they will receive a “salary”

A worker is assigned to individual/family and follows their progress for the two years of the integration programme. After the two years, they are expected to enter the work environment or further education. If they do not, their “salary” is sanctioned. They did concede this was not ideal, saying many Norwegians are still not accepting of immigrants and while an immigrant may be available for work, it still require being offered a job and where further education was concerned, it was said it was not always practical for people to go and study, as complicated child care arrangements and often after training, there were still no jobs available to them.

Feedback

Norway says in is very new to the concept of a multi-cultural society and many would rather not get use to it. Today for me, demonstrated that. On both visits, I got this underlying feeling from speaking with people that they would rather not have to deal with the issue of immigrants and refugees.

There is a tremendous feeling of national pride amongst the Norwegian society but at times it did feel somewhat racist and anti anyone who was not “one of them” A day that left me with many unanswered questions and thoughts.

Friday 14th June 04

New page – A foundation working with young people aged 14 – 18. They aim was to engage youths at the fringe of society to reduce crime. Our speaker claimed the organisation had already saved the Norwegian government 120 million Kroner. When asked how this figure had been reached, she indicated it was a figure plucked from the air.

Again this was another programme, aimed at the immigrant population. There Manager was a black national basketball player and there programme centred around engaging young people through basketball. We were then shown a slide show of their activities, which featured no immigrants.

The group’s philosophy is a simple one; they say if a young person attends school twice a week, look at the positives in this and no not focus on the three days they do not attend.

Throughout Oslo and environs they have thirty-eight (38) workers, working with twenty (20) young people!!

They are also lobbying the government, as they say gambling among young people is a serious problem, yet slot machines are found everywhere young people are. They want to see them removed from shops, cafes etc.

M.I.F.A project

Minorities in focus in Academia – Their role is to recruit more minority students to take up HE courses. Again due to the policy that you cannot ask a person their nationality or ethnic origin, they don’t have statistics to show what the situation is presently, so I was not sure how they would measure the success of the programme. They said they look at people’s surnames to establish how many minority students they have. Asked if they had considered that maybe minorities were not interested in pursuing higher education courses, especially based on the information they had given us, saying there are many minority people in Norway with Degrees, driving taxis and doing manual labour.

Another issue I had with what was being said, was the fact that if the University wanted to be more reflective of it’s society, then it had to first look at it’s prospectus, which was the first thing that struck me when I looked at it. There was no-one init that I felt represented me. There was not one picture of a minority ethnic person. Like a lot of the projects we visited and people we met, I did get the feeling that the majority of people I came in contact with were really

making tremendous efforts to embrace this seemingly new concept of multiculturalism.

Feedback

Norway has just started on the journey, in terms working with young people with multiple issues and dealing with and accepting that their society is changing and becoming multicultural.

There is some resistance to this change we were told, as there has been an increase in Neo Nazi activities among the youth of Norway.

I would love to return to Norway in 3-5 years to see how it has progressed.

**Avan Bell
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20th June 2004.**