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Personal objectives of exchange

I work for Careers Wales North West. Two days a week I work as a Careers Adviser, specialising in work with unemployed 16-17 year olds. The other three days a week I have a development and co-ordination role with the services we provide to young people wishing to enter the labour market.

Much of my work involves referring young people to work-based training opportunities. In Wales this involves one of three options:

- ◆ A Modern Apprenticeship; for young people with at least three GCSEs at grade C. This involves working towards a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) at Level 3.
- ◆ A Foundation Modern Apprenticeship; for young people with lower grade GCSEs, but with the ability to complete an NVQ at Level 2
- ◆ Skill Build; for young people not yet able to enter an apprenticeship because of a lack of work-related skills, a lack of vocational focus, or a lack of a suitable training opportunity; or for young people not able to achieve an NVQ at Level 2

Most of the clients I deal with are unemployed. Some will have returned to school or college for post compulsory education and have realised that this option is not right for them at that time. Some will have decided to seek employment or training rather than remaining in education after their official school-leaving date. And some will have left school early and consequently lack any academic qualifications.

These clients are referred to as being NEET, Not in Education, Employment or Training. Working with this client group has become a key objective of Careers Wales, and the Welsh Assembly Government has set us a target of increasing the percentage of this client group that registers with us.

I wanted to undertake a guidance exchange in order to see what work is undertaken with this client group in other countries. My hope was that I would be able to identify examples of good practice that we would be able to implement in Careers Wales North West, and, possibly, across Careers Wales as a whole.

At the moment there is also a review of work-based learning being undertaken in Wales. I also hoped to be able to examine work-based learning in Ireland, which has a similar economy to Wales, especially with regard to rurality, and which has benefited from Objective 1 funding in the recent past. My objective would then be to feed my findings into the Welsh review process.

1. Diary of activities

- Day 1: orientation at **National Council for Guidance in Education** (NCGE), Prussia Street, Dublin
- Short, informal presentations from participants on guidance and education systems in their own countries
- Day 2: Work shadowing through **Local Employment Service** (LES), Amiens Street, Dublin.
- am - Introduction to LES staff and brief guide to work of LES. Visit to **North City Centre Community Action Project** (NCCCAP), a Community Training Workshops for 16 –25 year-olds, offering training in Catering, Technical Life Skills, Coaching for Sport, Office Procedures and Woodwork.
- pm - Visit to **Dublin Adult Literacy Centre**, Mountjoy Square, Dublin. Discussion with guidance counsellor working with adults wishing to re-enter the labour market
- Day 3: Continued work shadowing with LES.
- am - Visit to **Trinity College** for open day for Trinity Access Programme. Access programme for adults aged 23 or over with a background of disadvantage.
- pm - Visit to **Dublin Institute of Technology** open day
- Day 4: Opted out of group visit to **University College Dublin**. Arranged own programme
- am - Visited **Youthreach** centre, North Great George's St. A centre for 14-22 year olds. Part of federal second-chance education & training network
- pm - Visit to **FÁS**, training and employment centre, D'Olier St. Discussion on range of training courses and programmes organised by FÁS
- Day 5: Evaluation and de-brief session at NCGE. Presentation on establishment of National Guidance Forum and international developments in the recognition and promotion of guidance

2. Vocational training

One of the more interesting aspects of the exchange was the opportunity to meet participants from a range of European countries and to find out more about the guidance and education systems in their countries.

One theme which seemed to re-occur during these discussions was the separation of educational and vocational guidance in other countries. For example, in Spain, schools have teams of advisers, some of whom are academic guidance counsellors, and some of whom are vocational guidance counsellors.

A similar division took place in Norwegian schools until the 1980s, and today vocational guidance for young people in Norway is still offered by AETAT, the public employment service. In Italy vocational education and guidance is the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour, whilst academic guidance is provided by the Ministry of Education.

In Ireland academic guidance is provided by the Department of Employment, which provides guidance counsellors in secondary schools. Guidance in other levels of education, such as further education colleges and HE (or Third-Level) colleges is provided by other organisations such as the network of locally-managed organisations known as Vocational Education Committees (VEC) and the colleges themselves.

The National Council for Guidance in Education (NCGE) is a professional body which supports guidance counsellors working in education and conducts research which informs the policies of the Department of Education.

Vocational guidance, especially with regard to vocational training opportunities, is provided by a separate organisation, Foras Áiseanna Saothair (FÁS), the Training and Employment Authority.

FÁS was established in 1988 to provide a wide range of services for jobseekers and employers. FÁS offers vocational guidance, planning and support to jobseekers, recruitment services to employers and also has a statutory responsibility to collect and publish information on the labour market.

FÁS is also responsible for organising and providing vocational training in Ireland. FÁS works, through its various programmes, with clients from the age of 14 to retirement, and it has a number of programmes aimed specifically at people with special needs and the long-term unemployed. However, the programmes which most interested me were those which are available to early school-leavers and NEET clients seeking to undergo training.

These programmes are as follows:

Apprenticeships

FÁS has responsibility for the organisation and control of all apprentice training in Ireland. FÁS makes the Rules of Apprenticeship in consultation with employers, trade unions and the Department of Education and Science. FÁS also maintains a register of apprentices and has responsibility for overseeing their training and related education, and also for recording their progress through all phases of the Apprenticeship.

Apprenticeships normally last four years and are mostly divided into seven phases, four on-the-job with the employer and three in an FE college or a FÁS Community Training Workshop (CTW). There are 20 of these workshops located around Ireland.

In order to undertake an apprenticeship, a young person must be at least 16 and have a minimum of five grade Ds in the Junior Leaving Certificate (the equivalent of the GCSE), or equivalent.

Applicants who do not possess the necessary academic qualifications, or who are unsure which route to follow, may take a preparatory training course in a CTW. These courses last around six months and focus on the essential skills needed in an apprenticeship, such as maths linked to craft occupations and technical drawing. In comparison to preparatory training courses in Wales, run through Skill Build, the courses in Ireland appear to place much more emphasis on vocational training and technical skills.

Apprenticeships are available in a more limited number of routes than in Wales. Twenty-five trades are covered, and these are all practical craft occupations such as Carpenter/Joiner, Electrician, Motor Mechanic and Plumber. A full list is included as Appendix 1

Occupations such as Administration, Retail and Childcare are not available as Apprenticeships. Instead these are offered through Traineeships and other training courses. (*see page 7*)

Young people are responsible for finding their own placements, although FÁS does have a vacancy database, which is available on-line, and FÁS employment advisers will help young people with their search.

Apprentices are paid by their employers during on-the-job phases, and by FÁS when in a training centre or college. Wage rates are determined by individual industry bodies. For example: someone moving on to Phase 2, after three months in an Apprenticeship in the motor industry, would receive €158.10 a week (*approx £113*); in the construction industry they would receive €203.58 (*approx £147*); and they would receive €202.80 (*approx £146*) as an apprentice electrician. The wage rates rise consistently and compare very favourably with

the minimum training allowance system in operation in Wales, which allows for an apprentice to be paid £50 a week during a two or three-year Apprenticeship. (although some employers do offer more than this minimum amount)

Traineeships

Like Apprenticeships, Traineeships also involve alternating periods of time spent in a FÁS CTW and with an employer. Traineeships are shorter than apprenticeships, usually lasting around 36 weeks, and have less stringent entrance requirements. The initial period of a Traineeship is spent in a FÁS CTW, learning a range of specific occupational skills, before the trainee moves into the employer's workplace.

Traineeships are designed to meet the needs of the Irish economy and in particular the needs of local industries and even individual employers. The schedule of training is agreed jointly by FÁS and employers.

Traineeships are available in a diverse range of occupations, such as office procedures, hairdressing, telesales, windscreen repair, industrial automation, bakery, insurance broking, childcare, retail and many more. However not all routes are available everywhere. Provision depends upon the demands of local industry.

Trainees are paid an allowance by FÁS. Trainees aged 15-16 receive €54.90 a week (*approx £39*); 17 year-olds receive €68.60(*approx £49*); and those aged 18 or over receive €134.80 (*approx £98*)

Training Courses

These are shorter courses run in FÁS CTWs, or in other workshops funded by FÁS. They do not have the employer-based element of Traineeships and Apprenticeships.

Courses are available during the day, evening or part-time. Some courses are also available on-line. Those attending full-time day courses are paid a training allowance at the same rate as those in Traineeships.

Some of these courses are tailored towards personal development and technical life skills. These courses equate to some of the less-vocational Skill Build courses run in Wales. It is possible to progress from one of these courses to a Preparatory Training Course and then on to an Apprenticeship.

Summary of main points

- ◆ all Apprenticeships and Traineeships are run by a national training organisation – FÁS
- ◆ Structured Apprenticeships are only available in 25 technical craft occupations
- ◆ Training in other occupations is available through shorter traineeships
- ◆ Apprentices must demonstrate sufficient academic ability to undertake technical training
- ◆ Preparatory Training is available to those wishing to undertake Apprenticeships without the necessary academic qualifications
- ◆ Personal development and life-skills courses are also available in CTWs
- ◆ There is a distinction between vocational and social/personal development courses, unlike in Wales, where all non-Apprenticeship training is referred to as Skill Build
- ◆ Rates of pay for apprentices are significantly higher than the minimum training allowance in Wales, although 16-17 year-olds in Traineeships and on training courses receive slightly less than their counterparts in Wales
- ◆ Traineeships and training courses are available to young people from the age of 15, irrespective of whether they have reached the minimum school-leaving age

4. Tackling early school-leavers

As in Wales, and the rest of the UK, the numbers of young people leaving school early has been identified as a key problem to be tackled in other areas of Europe.

In Norway, for example, the demand placed upon guidance services by young people with personal and social problems is starting to take counsellors' time away from working other client groups. Norway now has a youth follow-up service, whose specific role is to follow-up all young people aged 16-19 who are NEET, in order to encourage them back into education, employment or training.

Norway also operates 13 youth information centres, designed to help people aged 13-30. These centres offer a drop-in service and have telephone and e-mail facilities available to callers. They are ostensibly holistic centres, providing information and advice on a range of issues, such as travel, leisure, health and money problems. However, half of all enquiries they deal with relate to the choice of education or work options. It seems that these centres act as an effective medium for drawing young people in and engaging with them.

Ireland also operates a network of Youth Information Centres.

Youth Information Centres

Youth Information Centres (YIC) provide a free, confidential information service to young people on a range of subjects including careers, education, sport, leisure and travel.

They are located around Ireland and are designed to be a first point of contact for young people looking for information or advice on a specific topic. The centres are designed to be informal and young people are encouraged to drop-in even if they do not have any specific queries. They are free to browse through magazines and newspapers, watch a video or pick up application forms.

Many YICs offer additional low-cost services such as CV preparation and internet access.

Youthreach

Youthreach is an initiative directly aimed at unemployed early school-leavers. It is designed to offer these young people a second chance to gain qualifications, to explore career opportunities and to examine personal issues.

Youthreach centres are located across Ireland. The Youthreach network encompasses 80 Youthreach Centres, 45 Community Training Workshops and 27 traveller Training Centres. Each centre is managed by a local Vocational Education Committee (VEC) and the network is centrally co-ordinated to create a

federal second-chance education and training network. Youthreach is jointly managed by the Department of Education and Science, and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

Youthreach programmes are available to unemployed early school-leavers aged 14-22 years old. They are full-time courses and young people are paid an allowance of between €50 (£36) a week at 14 and €180 (£130) a week at 18 for attending.

The aim of Youthreach is to equip young people with a range of skills, including life skills, and to enable them to gain nationally-recognised qualifications such as the Junior Certificate, or an equivalent qualification, such as a FETAC certificate. Courses are available in a range of subjects such as art, woodwork, outdoor education and home economics. Maths and English modules from the Junior Certificate are also available. Youthreach students also undertake work experience.

Youthreach also offers general life skills courses. One example of these is the technical life skills course at NCCCAP in Dublin, which covers maths, literacy, life & social skills, job seeking skills, safety, introduction to IT including internet and Microsoft Office, art & craft skills and personal development

Youthreach essentially represents an alternative education centre for those young people who would otherwise drop out of education without any qualifications. After gaining foundation certificates through Youthreach, young people are then able to progress on to specific skills training with FÁS.

Clients may be referred to Youthreach by schools, probation services or social welfare services. But clients can also refer themselves, and many simply walk in off the street when they feel ready to undertake a Youthreach programme.

Young People may remain on Youthreach for as long as they need to, up to the maximum age of 22, and will only take external exams when they feel they are ready. Enrolment on courses is continuous, and facilities exist to arrange courses for discrete groups, such as young mothers, who need a course tailored to their specific needs.

At the moment a guidance pilot is being run in some Youthreach centres, after an evaluation of the programme identified a lack of such services as a main weakness.

Attendance monitoring committee

Some secondary schools in Ireland have committees that meet regularly to monitor the attendance of individual pupils. These committees comprise representatives of the school, the Garda, the probation service, social welfare

services, the guidance counsellor and FÁS, amongst others. The aim of the committees is to identify those pupils at risk of dropping out or exclusion, in order to provide interventions which keep those young people engaged in some form of education or training. The options available include offering the pupils places on FÁS training courses or Youthreach.

This pre-emptive approach has been successful in keeping many young people within a learning environment.

Summary of main points

- ◆ Strong emphasis on services to help young, unemployed school-leavers and early-leavers
- ◆ Services available at point of initial disengagement, unlike in Wales where we cannot offer young people places on training until they reach their official school-leaving date, which is the last Friday in June of year 11. This means that in Ireland pre-emptive action can be taken to prevent disaffected young people from falling through the net
- ◆ Opportunities to gain credible qualifications through Youthreach and FÁS training centres, including maths and English modules from the Junior Certificate. This means that dropping-out of school doesn't represent as much of a barrier to progression as it does in Wales
- ◆ The provision is split between different agencies, such as FÁS and Youthreach, which could mean a lack of clarity for young people, and a duplication of resources
- ◆ A current lack of input from guidance professionals. This means young people may lack direction when entering training and choosing between exit opportunities

5. Ways forward for Wales

(A) National Training Organisation

All work-based vocational training in Ireland is run by FÁS, the national training and employment authority. This provides a streamlined and efficient service which is able to respond to national, regional and local needs. FÁS exists purely as a public service, rather than as a profit making organisation. The existence of a single organisation ensures the consistent delivery of quality training and transparency between FÁS and all other services working with the same clients. The national training organisation is also able to efficiently manage a national network of training centres, both public and privately owned, providing essential skills training.

(B) Training centres

One of the issues currently being debated during the development of the 14–19 Learning Pathways is the means of ensuring a sufficiency of training centres in Wales, able to cope with the demand from young people wishing to do vocational, rather than academic training; and as a way of providing realistic working environments for extended work experience. I would advocate that the national training model utilised in Ireland, which enables FÁS to operate and oversee a nationwide network of well-equipped Community Training Workshops, is one which could be investigated further to see how it could meet the needs of Wales.

(C) Services available to Young People prior to official school-leaving age

At the moment Careers Wales is able to establish contact with young people who have left school early through choice or exclusion. However, we are unable to do any substantial work with them until they reach their official school-leaving age. This can result in some NEET young people being known to Careers Wales over 12 months before we can help them find employment or training. Many of these young people will therefore disengage entirely, or move into the black market, making it much more difficult to encourage them back into skilled employment, education or training. In Ireland a young person would be able to undertake an academic, vocational or social training course immediately.

I believe the lack of such an option for Careers Wales impedes our work to reduce the number of NEET young people in Wales.

(D) Realistic levels of training

In Ireland a young person wishing to do an Apprenticeship needs five grade Ds in the Junior Leaving Certificate, or equivalent. And Apprenticeships are only available in technical craft occupations.

It is, however, possible to enter other occupations through shorter Traineeships and training courses.

There is a clear distinction made between the amount of training needed to become, for example, an electrician and a shop assistant.

In Wales it is possible to begin a Foundation Modern Apprenticeship at NVQ Level 2 without any qualifications. And training programmes for all Apprenticeships currently last the same amount of time.

I would argue that the Irish system is more realistic in that it demands proven academic ability and extended, well-paid, training for technical occupations; and shorter, competence-based training for others.

Where an applicant does not meet the entrance requirements for an Apprenticeship, opportunities exist to obtain them. And where an applicant does not have the ability to do an Apprenticeship, it is still possible for them to achieve competence and nationally-recognised qualifications in other occupations.

(E) Youthreach

Youthreach offers a template on which a standardised Skill Build course could be based. At present there is no standard Skill Build course in Wales, and content varies greatly from area to area. Some Skill Build courses offer excellent personal development, but little vocational training. Others have extensive work-based elements, but offer little in the way of support for personal and social problems. Some offer little more than basic IT courses.

Youthreach courses, whilst varied themselves in their detail, have commonality in that they all offer a mixture of personal development and vocational training. The opportunity exists for all students to undertake vocational skills training and work-experience, and to work towards FETAC certificates that have relevance and credibility. It is also possible to do the English and maths modules of the Junior Leaving Certificate as part of these certificates. Students are therefore excellently placed to progress on to FE or work-based training.

There is also a recognition that young people on Youthreach need to move forward in their own time and at their own pace. In Wales, Skill Build courses are measured in 13 week blocks, and Careers Wales has to justify any decision to extend a young person's time on Skill Build beyond 13 weeks.

Where Skill Build does offer better practice than Youthreach is in the initial and continued assessment and guidance of young people, which is provided by Careers Wales. This is crucial in ensuring that the programme followed on Skill Build and the exit option chosen by the young person are the most appropriate for them.

(F) Youth Information Centres

Careers Wales North West currently provides many of the services available in YICs, such as CV preparation and internet access, free of charge to young people. Our research has shown, however, that young people regard our Careers Centres as a place to go if you want a job or advice about careers, and for no other reason. The same research has also indicated that our clients would prefer a more informal atmosphere in the Careers Centres, with magazines, music television and more comfortable seating areas. And the services currently available, like internet access and water coolers are not sufficiently advertised to clients to make them all aware that they are available.

YICs in other countries seem to be used almost as a front to draw-in young people and engage them. I believe that it would take very little effort and cost to emulate some of the functions of the YICs in other countries and that a more informal approach in our Careers Centres is certainly worth looking at in an attempt to pull-in some of the harder-to-reach NEET group.

Appendix 1 - Trades offered via Apprenticeships in Ireland

Agricultural mechanic	Metal fabricator
Aircraft mechanic	Motor mechanic
Bookbinder	Originator
Bricklayer	Painter / Decorator
Cabinet maker	Plasterer
Carpenter / Joiner	Plumber
Carton maker	Printer
Construction plant fitter	Refrigeration craftsperson
Electrician	Sheet metal worker
Fitter	Toolmaker
Floor / wall tiler	Vehicle body repairer
Heavy vehicle mechanic	Wood machinist
Instrumental craftsperson	

Glossary

CTW	Community Training Workshop – generic term for training centre offering a range of vocational skills training and personal development courses. CTWs are either part of FÁS training network or Youthreach network
FÁS	Foras Áiseanna Saothair - the national Training and Employment Authority
FETAC	Further Education and Training Awards Council - Examinations board specialising in vocational and post-compulsory education
NCCCAP	North Centre City Community Action Project – Youthreach Community Training Workshop
NCGE	National Council for Guidance in Education – Part of the Ministry of Education. Provides professional support to guidance practitioners in education and conducts research on behalf of the Ministry
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training – generic term for disengaged young people
VEC	Vocational Education Committee – Irish equivalent of Local Education Authority, responsibilities include funding and oversight of Youthreach training centres
YIC	Youth Information Centre – drop-in centre for young people, offering advice and information on a range of subjects including careers, health and leisure