

Academia 8th – 12th March

The reasons for applying for placement.

- To learn about other education and guidance systems.
- Reflect on own practice and share good practice with colleagues
- Share information about projects and working with young people
- Give better advice and guidance regarding exchange programme to clients
- Improved understanding of working in other countries

Advantages of going on an exchange. A week away from the normal day-to-day stresses of working and a chance to see and talk about guidance with experienced guidance advisers. Makes you realise you are part of Europe.

Day one

Today started with an introduction to Ireland and other EU countries education and guidance systems. This was a great opportunity to compare and contrast the different systems. It enabled me to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of guidance system in UK by being aware of the changes and developments in other countries guidance education and employment service.

I have been involved in a project called “Here to Help “ which was about training a range of front line agencies to be confident and skilled in answering basic questions about returning to learning or work. Ireland have also used European money to fund a project that enabled front line staff in community projects to be able to signpost adults returning to learning.

It was also reassuring to hear that in Norway the guidance advisers were spending more time talking/ solving social issues than giving careers guidance about options. This made me aware how lucky we are to have both aspects as part of our job.

The first day was very informative and interesting. Our hosts made us very comfortable and were genuine in their efforts to meet the group’s demands. Our host answered our questions about the work and locality. This introduction was key to our understanding of the exchange visits to guidance and education centres. Major differences were in the length of time young people took to complete an apprenticeship. Four years in Ireland. Also first degrees were without fees.

Our host confirmed our programme for the rest of the week and made sure we understood who and where we were meeting.

Day two

Started with a visit to a local employment service (LES) where guidance and mentoring takes place. FAS equivalent to JPlus may have referred clients to LES. LES premises were physically placed in disadvantaged areas. Concentrating on issues in a very local area.

The advisers told us that clients did not want to move away from local area for training or work.

Staff here worked with client’s aged 16 upwards

There is one guidance worker and two mentors work at LES. They do not work with refugees unless their status has been obtained. This is a new challenge for the guidance workers, with clients coming here rather than the Irish leaving.

They see about three clients a day. They all stressed the need to work at being realistic with their clients. It appeared to be a very client centred approach. The mentors carried out the role of motivating and encouraging clients to enter training or

work. The appointments varied in length from 20 minutes to 1 and a half hours. Some clients are "sent" from FAS (JCPlus) whilst others are self-referred. They assist with job search strategies and practical help.

The guidance worker also works intensively with a range of clients. Peter explained that the research often taking longer than the client contact.

Next was a visit to NCCP youth outreach

16 year – 19 year olds were offered youth reach. The centre I visited had five programmes to offer. All young people were encouraged to work towards gaining their junior leaving cert and they were taught this alongside their vocational choice. It was great to see some of the artwork such as mosaics completed with a local artist. These had not been vandalised and had the young person names on the seats in a local Park. We met some of the young people taking woodwork as part of their course. We looked at their work and were able to discuss the programme with their tutor. This scheme appeared to be really flexible and time off was taken by young people to enable them to meet other commitments. There were five projects for young people to choose from in catering, wood occupations, sports coaching, office and IT.

It was great to meet some young people, including the lad building a coffin.

Staff appeared to be very accepting of young people changing their mind and trying more than one option.

At this project the challenges were space and the strict timetable for exams, they were also often given resources such as computers when they actually needed other equipment.

The exchange was made exciting, as you never knew what you were going to learn next. We were introduced to a local historian who told us about the drug issues affecting the youth and their parents. There was even a monument to 200 dead children in the area. This is a sobering memorial that seeks to remind the public of how housing needs and long-term unemployed can play such a crucial part in influencing young peoples actions. Employment in Ireland has changed enormously in the last 40 years.

Next was a visit to DALC

An adult basic skills programme established to support a local area. They were housed in a beautiful Georgian building. The steps alone I'm sure would have put some people off. The guidance worker here meets future clients and encourages them to take the first step back to learning beyond the basic skill level. Clients did not feel able to access training or work in other parts of the city. The guidance worker showed us where the lessons take place and often the learners will be in small rooms with their tutor and therefore there were difficulties in encouraging the learners to access guidance. This was a good example of basic and introductory skills teaching, combining free access to information advice and guidance.

In the evening I met with Ann from Norway who had also been to a local employment service. She had hoped to see a group work take place but this did not happen the nature of the beast. Also found out more about guidance system in Norway. Ann had taken guidance as part of her degree however other guidance workers came from a variety of backgrounds rather than having the theory and practical skills of guidance. My understanding is that there is no co-coordinated training for guidance workers in

Norway. Ann's work is to offer guidance and support to a range of people who have to look at re training due to illness or accident. Ann actually works in the employment office. This seemed very similar to our New deal advisers work.

Day three

Met Peter our host from LES at Trinity College and attended open event for Trinity Access Programme (TAP) basically an access course for those who had not had the opportunity to gain the qualifications to enable them to progress to degree level education. By far the most inspiring part of the morning was when students on the programme and students who had now started their degree or post graduate courses spoke about what the TAP programme had meant for them. These accounts were honest and at times humorous and clearly the support on the course and their future studies has changed their lives. Also given practical advice how to apply.

References were required from guidance workers or members of the community projects they could be involved in. There was even a TAP society at the college enabling informal support to be given to individual students or in a group setting.

The afternoon was spent at Dublin's Institute of Technology open day. Looked at range of courses and facilities. Good to see that support was given to ex students and that if they wanted to do other courses here they were given a reduction on fees. Also offered a "friends re united" style contact was kept up which provides a range of benefits and services to keep students informed and involved. This meant there was a group designed for professionals, which included social networking.

Discussions with host enabled me to find out that entry to University is by points alone. Each year the popular nature of a course could change the entry requirements using the point scheme. The point's scheme was seen as being fairer as the universities were likely to know the young people. No interviews take place although there are open days.

I also learnt that whilst working in Belfast as a school guidance adviser using an IQ test generated his work. If a student was "red" then they were seen the amber and green were judged to be able to make career decisions on their own.

Day four

Today started with a long bus journey to University City Dublin a campus university open day. The first part of the morning was spent looking at the range of courses available and a visit to the guidance centre, where we learnt about the issues affecting the university and it's students. The youth population in Ireland is reducing and this means the University is expanding the opportunities available to others such as mature students. My personal feeling entering the university was its size and the confidence of the young people. There were large crowds exploring the campus and checking out the facilities. Generally careers advice was given to students in their last year. In Ireland students are more likely to take their gap year after their first degree. This is before postgraduate studies or masters, which are funded by the student. FAS employment service offer European placements and other country exchanges students are going to Japan.

We then attended careers colloquium with guidance advisers from school. Teachers wanted to express their thanks for some of the new developments but they also voiced their frustrations with not being kept up to date with information and the style of presentation. This was a lively meeting. Each adviser was given his or her own copy of the support a student with a disability could expect at UCD. There are student advisers in each faculty and for the first time they have appointed a vice president to look after the non-academic side of a student at this University.

The degrees on offer enabled students to take other modules such as to learn a language without having to take an exam. Most degrees took four years to complete. Heads of department explained changes in courses they have removed the language requirement for some courses. Accommodation and fees were also explained.

CAO (replaces UCAS) needs to be completed by 1st of May.

There was some criticism of the points system and teachers were voicing concerns re matriculation explaining that time was spent on some subjects but not all core subjects.

Questions raised regarding drop out in first year of degree is it lack of ability or lack of information. UCD explained 2 % drop out to change to another course at UCD or another institution. They have a student adviser in each faculty to assist with students making choices thereby reducing early leavers rate and we were advised that if students find themselves on the wrong course they can change if early enough and that they have the academic requirements for the new course. Please do not advertise this.

Tracking and monitoring of students is taking place. When a young person leaves they are given an exit interview to ascertain the reason why. The student advisers act like Connexions advisers.

The new modular degrees in 2005 are designed to be more student friendly, enabling students to complete parts of a degree and if necessary take time off before completing the whole degree.

Lunchtime was spent with schoolteachers who are also guidance advisers in schools. It was a great opportunity for networking and discussing differences in the systems. Generally the Irish do not change schools. There was also mixed opinions on the transition year. This enables some students to have a year without taking exams but to have a year at school learning about the world of work and personal development activities. Work experience is not organised by the school unless the young person is taking a transition year.

The afternoon was a presentation from the centre for continuing professional education. This department is growing with adults returning to learn and continue to gain accreditation relating to the work place. The training is delivered in a range of style and formats to meet the industry standards. It was also recognising that face-to-face contact was also essential for all learners to make the most of the learning experience. All courses are modular which has extended the range and levels of courses offered through UCD. There are also links with FAS (similar to our job centre plus) The FAS are also sometimes able to arrange the use of their premises for courses. These links between the job centre and education appears to be much closer than in the UK.

Students are 60% male and 40% female and the majority are in employment. Many are new to education. It is all about life long learning. Employers pay fees and FAS sometimes are able to give grants.

The CPD department are offering a masters in careers guidance and are planning to offer some of the units on-line to enable those working to access the course. The skills part of this course however will be taught.

On reflection I saw how education could work more closely with local labour market departments. This would enable up to date information about the workforce and their needs to be linked to education when appropriate.

Day Five

Today started with an explanation of the French education and guidance system. In France the apprenticeships lasts for two years. The CIO generally employs guidance workers. In France once a person has left the education system for one year then the ministry of work meets their guidance needs. They offer a free adult service. In their schools it is law for pupils to have information and guidance. The French government want the guidance workers to carry out their work in-group settings and the guidance workers are not happy with this approach.

We then heard about the background to setting up a national Guidance Forum. If this actually happens all European guidance workers will have support and guidance regarding training and good practice. Guidance is very much part of every countries lifelong learning and social inclusion. People need to become self-managing with regards to their education, training and working lives.

We then shared our experiences with other group members. Ann had visited a drugs rehabilitation project where people could stay there for up to three years. The project supplied short courses and support to enable people to deal with family structure, parenting skills, basic computer courses and mentoring. She also saw another LES and youth reach project.

FAS (JCP) have training centres, which offer different training programmes dependent on age, need of the unemployed and the length of time they have been unemployed. They are able to work part-time for up to 3years with an employer and FAS will pay the wage.

Conclusion

This was a great experience I have returned to Cornwall and Devon Connexions with lots of information. NCGE have given me leaflets relating to the national framework and examples of leaflets designed to support the range of work carried out by guidance advisers. I have experienced an exchange and would recommend it to others whether as part of an education course or employment.

I have an understanding of another education and guidance system and that it is likely that we will have policy's from Europe supporting guidance workers in areas such as training and good practice.

I have had a week away from insight and have been able to ask other guidance workers about their work and discussed the difficulties and challenges that they face on a daily basis. I have also made friends from other countries and this is always positive.

As time progresses I realise that the effects of this week away will continue to influence my thoughts and actions.-

Thank you to everyone who has made this exchange a reality for me.