

REPORT ON STUDY VISIT TO ICELAND

May 10th – May 14th 2004

Penni Barker – Connexions Cornwall and Devon

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Introduction:

This report provides an insight into the activities and learning that came about through my study visit to Iceland which was arranged by Mr Bjarni Kristjánsson of the Euroguidance centre (based at the University of Iceland) and Careers Europe with the support of a LEONARDO grant. The visit gave a valuable insight into Icelandic culture and how guidance and counselling fit into areas of learning and work within that. It enabled the exchange of ideas and good practice both with the people and organizations we visited and between myself and the two colleagues that also took part in the exchange. It was useful to be able to compare ways of working and types of provision with my colleagues who were Angela Jones, a bilingual careers adviser working for Careers Wales and Sue Claydon, manager of the Adult Information, Advice and Guidance partnership for Cambridge and Peterborough. This visit also gave me a firm sense of the European dimension and it was inspiring to gain insight into the range of European projects and pilots that organizations in Iceland are involved in.

Monday 10th May – a.m.

Hitt Husið – The Other House

Hitt Husið, or the ‘Alternative House’, is based in central Reykjavik in an old Post Office Building. It is a cultural and information centre for young people aged 16-25 and is run by the Youth and Sports Council of Reykjavik Municipality. There are a variety of projects and facilities housed here and our hosts were Mr Björn Vilhjálmsson and Rolex the Sharpei. Both the centre and the people were relaxed and inviting and we were introduced to the various activities going on. Through all of these there came a sense of the real value put on art and cultural activities in the development of young people and their sense of Icelandic identity.

Facilities that young people can access here include:

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| The Court Hall (Dómssalurinn) | - a large meeting room with cooking facilities |
| The Art Workshop (Listsmiðjan) | - space and equipment for young people to be creative |
| Galleri Tukt | - where young people can apply to exhibit their work and get advice on setting up and promoting their shows |
| The Mousehole (Músarholan) | - an area with computers, printers, internet access and design and publishing software that young people can come and use |
| The Timemachine (Timavélin) | - a room with equipment for making and producing cds and videos |
| The Loft (Loftið) | - a large space at the top of the building with a stage, sound engineering equipment, a PA system and lighting rigs which can be used by young people to practice and put on gigs and plays |
| Ingólfur’s Square (Ingólfstorg) | - an outdoor square in the town which young people can use for meetings, festivities and events |

Projects housed at Hitt Husið include:

Information Centre – where young people can come to find out information and seek answers to a range of questions via staff, internet access and supported referral to other organizations and agencies

Culture Office - this oversees Gotuleikhusid (the street theatre) which runs every summer. Young people aged 17 and upwards can apply for financial and practical support in preparing and arranging productions on the streets and squares of the city. It is also involved in supporting young people to put on music concerts and other cultural events such as Unglist (Young Art), the young people’s art festival including music, design, fashion, photography, painting and theatre. This office plays a big role in terms of the real investment in, and value placed on, cultural, art and creative activities both in

promoting individual and social development as well as its significance in terms of financial exports and income generation.

Thursday Foreplay - Finntadagsforleikur runs during the winter months from the Loft on a Thursday evening. This gives young people the opportunity to arrange, put on and enjoy cultural events such as music concerts, theatre and other performance art and provides both social and learning opportunities, the latter in terms of organization, promotion and practicalities of running and overseeing such events.

The Special Unit - Sersveitin's role is in assisting people with disabilities to gain independence, boost their self confidence and empathy for others. It enables young people with a range of disabilities, both physical and learning, to identify the skills and abilities they have and support in developing and acquiring more through interaction and project work. Tipp Topp, the social activities program has a committee on which a number of young people with disabilities sit, voted for biannually, and help decide how funds should be spent and which projects should be funded, many of which are put forward by the client group of the unit. This gives a real sense of empowerment and these groups can get further support from staff in accessing further funding and support in arranging, running and producing events. Twinkling Stars (Blikandi stjornur) is a singing group which meets at the project weekly and aims to raise self esteem and confidence through singing and recently finished in the top 5 for a European award. The Improvisation group (Spunahópurinn) also seek to raise skills, confidence and esteem by enabling the clients to develop and put on theatre productions. They also run various interest clubs such as the Formula 1 club where clients get together to watch and discuss F1 Grand Prix races, and a chess club where participants can play and learn new techniques and tricks (the latter being supported by the Social Service of Reykjavik).

Students' Jobcentre - Vinnumidlun skolafofks accepts applications from students who wish to gain summer work and vacancies from companies and institutions in the city who have summer jobs available and acts as a matching service to place young people into the available posts. This year they have received 2500 applications for 900 jobs so it involves a certain level of selection and assessment to make good placements and matches. Icelandic students are able to gain work experience from the age of 13 but there are strict guidelines on the amount of work that can be done (13-14 year olds can work for 4 weeks, 15 year olds can work for 6 weeks and 16 year olds for 10 weeks).

17th June office - This office oversees, organizes and coordinates the national holiday event run by the Youth and Sports Council which happens on 17th June each year.

The Ink Group - Blekhopurinn is a group of young people enthusiastic about comics and cartoons, both writers and artists, who produce a comic called Blek for young people.

The 'Trojan Horse' office – this is where Björn is based and a variety of projects are run from this office. He explained that they used to run a variety of unemployment projects

from here including one for single mothers, but as unemployment fell to virtually zero in the early 1990's, the funding for such projects came to an end but now unemployment for young people is beginning to creep up, it seems that the funding for projects aimed at tackling this issue has all but disappeared. He also explained that, due to Icelandic Personal Protection laws relating to the exchange of data, it was not possible for youth organizations or unemployment projects to get information on school leavers, benefit claimants or young people who have dropped out of education or work. This means that it is sometimes difficult to identify those young people most in need of advice and support and as a result, most referrals come via word or mouth, from parents or from the community who may want to help a particular young person, or from guidance counselors in schools where the young person and parent have given their permission. They also take referrals from 'houses' – this means houses where young people have been accommodated under care orders or treated for drug or alcohol problems etc. Despite high employment and the difficulty in securing funding and identifying harder to help clients, there are several projects running from this office which aim to address the social and individual needs of young people who are/at risk of disengagement which include:

Peer education: Jafningjafraedslan has been operating since 1996 and is run by young people who recruit, train and support other young people to help facilitate peer education. One of the areas in which discussion is generated is drug issues and it aims to give young people a realistic education on the issues surrounding alcohol and drug misuse. This project provides support for disadvantaged young people and also has a role in feeding issues and findings up to government level.

The Highland Group: Hálandishópurinn is aimed at young people at risk who are given the opportunity to go on demanding trips into the interior of Iceland during the summer. The idea is that communication, team working and life skills are developed through outdoor activities including a two week hiking trip in the west fjords of Iceland. Bjorn commented that this has been a real success and has often been the turning point for disadvantaged young people who have been able to apply the skills and experience to their lives on returning to the city and enabled them to take a more positive perspective and make better decisions for themselves and their futures.

The Work team: Los Gormos is a project aimed at disadvantaged young people aged 16-18 run in cooperation with the Social Service of Reykjavik. It involves the identification of various work projects around the city for both individuals and institutions and gets young people involved in activities such as gardening, environmental work, painting, brick-laying etc. This way, young people gain valuable skills and work experience and people and institutions get projects completed for them.

Immigrants Group: this is a support group for young people who have moved to Iceland from different countries and run in cooperation with the Social Service of Reykjavik and the Immigrants' Centre. Its aim is to provide support and enable integration into Icelandic society and was formed in 1999 in recognition of the increasing number of immigrants from Poland, Russia, China and the Philippines.

Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous: both these organizations run regular support sessions at Hitt Husið and there are open meetings at midnight and the early hours of the morning to provide support to people who are struggling at the times when they would normally be out consuming drugs or alcohol. It also provided ongoing support for young people who had recently come out of rehabilitation or detoxification programs for drug or alcohol abuse.

Total Counselling: this is a LEONARDO funded project which aims to take a multi-disciplinary and holistic approach to meeting the needs of disadvantaged young people through a comprehensive counselling service for 18-25 year olds. It has several partners including centres based in Bradford, Slovenia, Rome, and other areas of Reykjavik. The aim is to provide a total counselling service to young people including advice on social, legal, health, education, housing, employment, substance misuse and sexual matters via links with other professionals. Young people can drop into the centre to access the service and although workers do not carry a caseload as such, clients can continue to access support through the project for as long as they need it. It involves supported referrals to a multi-agency team including a social worker, narcotics counsellor, financial advisor, legal advisor, leisure activities counsellor and a sexual counsellor. The project also has links with health services, Alcoholics Anonymous, government and municipal departments, training centres and schools among others and counsellors under this project will enable young people to access the support and services they need as well as motivating, encouraging and supporting young people to develop their sense of identity, place in the community and ability to investigate and choose appropriate learning and work opportunities. Part of the project has been to build an effective professional network so that young people can access specialist help when they need it without having to wait for long periods of time. For example, through partnership working, the project has managed to cut the time that a young person has to wait for an initial appointment with social welfare or psychological services. Björn also commented that the fact that a young person could be coming to Total Counselling for any number of reasons, means that there is less social stigma for young people accessing the service.

Summary

Hitt Husið houses a comprehensive range of young projects and services for a wide range of young people. Through our discussions with Björn, I learnt a great deal about youth work and support services available for disadvantaged young people as well as getting a better feel for how the education and guidance system works in Iceland. There were many similarities in the variety of approaches and projects but also some significant differences. The points that struck me most from our visit include:

- the difficulty in identifying young people at risk in the absence of central data on benefit claimants, school drop outs, those in social service care and struggling with alcohol or drug misuse issues. As vocational colleges (providing post 16 education) have around a 30% drop out rate, the lack of this data in early identification and intervention with at risk young people is significant, resulting in a 'black hole' of young people aged 16-18 who are 'lost'. This may also

contribute to generational patterns of disengagement and unemployment where several generations have experienced some sort of social exclusion because of social issues or unemployment. As we have access to such central data in the UK, it makes it easier to identify client groups but due to the volume of numbers in the 'disadvantaged' group and the resource restraints on agencies and organizations that can offer them support, the difficulty then becomes being able to fund and train enough workers on the ground that are able to spend the time needed to meet the needs of these young people, and demonstrating the long term benefits of such an investment of public monies in the short term.

- The issues around funding – the centre is funded partly by the municipality and partly by the state with European funding also allowing the development of individual projects such as Total Counselling. This makes it difficult to make long term and strategic plans for projects to address the needs of disadvantaged young people due to the specific and short term nature of funding for some areas of work such as that with unemployed and disadvantaged young people. There seem to be similarities here in terms of how support services and alternative learning provision is funded for young people in the UK. It also means that the priorities of any state funded service are driven by political priorities and targets, hence the current lack of funding available to Hitt Husið to run specific programme for unemployed young people as it is not currently seen as a political issue.

- Housing – as the state funds 95% of the purchase or building price of houses, the rental market is severely underdeveloped compared to the UK. This means that young people tend to stay at home longer (factors affecting this include the age of parental responsibility in Iceland being 18 and post 16 education/vocational options taking 4 years to complete rather than 2 as in the UK), but for those whom this is not an option, it often means housing issues or homelessness which are not easily overcome and usually involve seeking help and support from places such as Hitt Husið who can seek further advice and support from Social Services. For those at risk in this area, there are usually accompanying issues around social welfare and health. Although in the UK we have a joint protocol to house any young person who is homeless under the age of 18 which means they can be accommodated immediately (usually in bed and breakfast accommodation), accommodation may be unsuitable in a number of ways for a vulnerable young person and may negate other issues and factors which need addressing to enable the young person to avoid housing problems in the future and to help them to move forward and make a success of their lives. Both systems therefore have their issues but it appears that housing is a recurring theme for disadvantaged young people in Iceland and the UK but for different reasons.

- Drug and alcohol issues – the main agencies dealing with this include Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, Social Services and some parts of the Health Service. Alcohol is a significant problem in terms of misuse and addiction,

especially for those young people who are already disadvantaged e.g. homeless. Support is available through AA and NA meetings held at a variety of venues around the country and residential detoxification and rehabilitation programs are available for those referred through the appropriate routes after assessment of their addictions. Drug use is also a growing issue and on average, a young person will have been through a residential programme 4 times and reached the age of 24 before they can actually manage their substance misuse problems effectively. What was identified as an issue is the lack of structures in place to support the young people when they return to their environment following a residential period away, as going back to the same area with the same friends and possibly some of the same issues they had before e.g. lack of job and/or housing, means that it is difficult for these young people to sustain their improvements. As in the UK, it appears that the transition from intensive support and programs back to reintegration and ongoing management, is crucial to the success or otherwise of interventions. The difficulty is in the availability and funding of some sort of stepping stone between programme and social reintegration.

This was a really informative and interesting visit and it was great to meet such a lovely group of people who were enthusiastic and committed to providing essential support and guidance to a wide range of young people, without whom, the young people would be at considerably more disadvantage. It also reinforced the importance of art, culture and creative experience in the identity of Icelanders which in turn encouraged a strong sense of identity and self esteem/confidence in the young people who use the centre.

Monday 10th May – p.m.

Jonina Kardal: President of Félag náms- og starfsráðgjafa – The Icelandic Association of Careers Counselling

Jonina, who is the President of the Icelandic Association of Careers Counselling, welcomed us at her home (as she was currently on maternity leave) for coffee, pancakes and an insight into the evolution of the role of the guidance counsellor in Iceland and the development of the association and professional qualifications. She is based at the Counselling Centre at the University of Iceland and became the president of the association recently, following completion of postgraduate studies in the USA and working as a guidance counsellor herself. She gave us both an outline of guidance counselling in Iceland and the development and role of the association.

Guidance counseling had historically concentrated on education in Iceland and counselors are employed directly by educational institutions, unemployment offices and large companies. Careers education and guidance is part of the curriculum in compulsory schooling for 13-15 year olds, delivered by guidance counsellors in the schools, many of whom have teaching duties in addition to their counselling role. The provision of guidance counsellors in secondary schools is laid down in legislation and the provision is holistic in that it includes personal counseling as well as careers information and advice. The upper secondary schooling system (post 16) incorporates academic and vocational routes but as it takes 4 years to complete these programs, there is a considerable level of drop out which has recently received publicity in the press. Counselling provision is also now being extended to elementary schools. Although there has traditionally been a focus for this work in educational settings, it is slowly shifting to incorporate ideas of work and career development including work based learning.

The association was founded in 1981 with 7 members but its role has developed and the aims of the association now include:

- to gather labour market information on occupations, skills needs and shortages, opportunities and vacancies, sector information and the proportions of employment provided by different industries and associated training opportunities within jobs.
- to develop the professional identity and provision of recognized qualifications and training for Icelandic guidance counsellors. This includes the recognition of the profession as a specialist service, the licensing of practitioners and the development of ethical guidelines and codes of practice in association with IAEVG (International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance).
- To develop the holistic concept for guidance i.e. with the move to provision within industry and employment services, within the framework of lifelong learning and development of more work based training opportunities and accreditation.

Jonina has worked on the development of postgraduate courses and qualifications that are now being delivered in Iceland as traditionally, counselors have gone to other countries for postgraduate training in this area. Training is delivered through the association, the University of Iceland and 200 partners who deliver training all over the island but are mainly concentrated in Reykjavik and Akureyri. In addition, the Ministry of Trade and Industry have come to the association for help with gathering information on trade sectors, career opportunities and occupational information as there is a lack of research into these areas in Iceland.

Summary

The Association has an active and important role in research and development of both the guidance profession and work/careers opportunity structure in Iceland. There are some interesting contrasts to systems in the UK which include:

- the direct employment of guidance counsellors by elementary, secondary, upper secondary schools and universities, employment offices and commercial companies. This coupled with the current lack of ethical guidelines and professional standards, in the UK, might be cause for alarm. However, for various reasons including the funding mechanisms for education in Iceland, there is not the conflict of interest or bias that one might expect. Guidance counsellors work for the benefit of the young person in a holistic way despite being employed directly for organizations whereas in the UK, guidance counsellors are employed by independent companies funded by the state to deliver impartial advice in a variety of settings including schools, youth and community settings and colleges. There is a more marked division of guidance services between young people and adults in the UK than there is in Iceland but there is less of an issue of accessing such services if the client is not engaged with an employer, educational institution or employment office which affects a number of disadvantaged young people in Iceland.
- The lack of labour market information and research into LMI trends and the developing and changing opportunity structure in Iceland. There is also no work based learning accreditation route such as the NVQ structure we have in the UK. It is interesting that the state are only now looking at funding the generation of such information through the association and Jonina commented that the lack of this information has led to a mismatch in skills and available posts, for example, the boom in computing led to lots of young people pursuing IT qualifications but jobs in this sector have now fallen. Without accurate LMI and a grasp of industry trends, skills shortages have resulted, hence the focus on gathering information to better predict opportunities and skill demands in various sectors. In the UK we have far more research and information available in this field but I'm unsure as to whether this makes us any better at predicting and equipping young people to take advantage of opportunity trends.
- Professional training is very different as guidance counsellors in Iceland have usually completed undergraduate degrees mainly in teaching or psychology and

then go on to take postgraduate guidance courses and qualifications through the universities in Iceland or in other countries such as the USA and UK. The postgraduate courses lasting two years involve assignments and work experience and all students who have undertaken this route have secured employment on completion of the qualification. There is no work based learning route such as the NVQs in Advice and Guidance or the PA Diploma that are available in the UK, although the postgraduate courses incorporate not just academic knowledge and theories but also the skill based competencies that would be covered within our work based learning routes. In some ways this helps in the establishment of guidance counselling as a recognized profession in Iceland but it may also preclude those people who have valid life experience and skills but who have not, for whatever reason, completed upper secondary and university qualifications.

Tuesday 11th May – a.m.

Fjölsmiðjan – Workplace for Young People

Fjölsmiðjan, or the ‘workplace for young people’ is an independent training provider based on an industrial estate in Reykjavik and provides work experience for disadvantaged and unemployed young people, 16-25, who have previously dropped out of education or are socially isolated/disadvantaged, although the main client group is 16-19. Our host was Mr Þorbjörn Jensson, founder and director of the training centre, who told us a little of the history of the project which is based on a Danish model, and was the first centre of its kind in Iceland. The centre started 3 years ago with funding from the Red Cross and is housed in a building originally belonging to the hospital. It is now maintained with funding from the original source as well as from the Ministry of Education and community funding. In addition, revenue is created through the various work contracts that the centre holds which feed the various workshops and enable any profits made to be reinvested in premises, tools and facilities for the centre. The centre generates 60,000,000 Icelandic Krona per year.

Referrals come from social services, the community, individuals and employment services although the young people can only attend the centre if they really want to and show motivation and commitment. At present there are 49 students attending the centre (12 female and 37 male) with another 100 on the waiting list for places. The average length of stay is 6-8 months but some young people had been there for as little as 3 months or as long as 2 years. It is the young person’s decision in consultation with the staff when they are ready to leave and the centre work with them to work out what their next step will be and help them plan how they can make it happen, supporting them through the process e.g. helping find additional funds to gain an HGV licence. 73% of those who attended had moved into work or back into education. Of the 27% who did not, this is normally due to mental health or alcohol/narcotic abuse issues but the centre played a big role in ensuring those young people got the necessary support, usually via Social Services, and enabling young people to reaccess the training centre when they were in a position to do so. This has resulted in productive and close working relationships between the staff and social workers for the benefit of the young people. The staff can also arrange access to psychologists and counselors for the young people.

The centre has 8 staff, 1 for every training section plus 1 administrator and 1 teacher who offered support in core subjects i.e. maths, Icelandic, Danish and English (those subjects that students would have to pass to reaccess the education system). The centre offers a range of opportunities in-house but also, through the industry links that Þorbjörn has developed, the centre has developed a range of work placement opportunities with local companies for 1 or 2 days a week, some of which have led to permanent jobs for the young people involved. There was a real sense of industry in the centre as young people attending were aware that they were doing real work to fulfill real contracts on which the centre depended and this generated a genuine work ethic amongst those attending. The young people attending receive a wage from social and unemployment benefits whilst they are engaged with the project, the monthly rate being around 85,000 Icelandic Krona

(about £650). Due to its success in reengaging young people in education and employment, the centre is being promoted all over Iceland and there are plans to provide two more centres in the west and north of the island to help address social and unemployment issues by getting communities and industry/businesses involved in supporting and helping develop this provision. The centre is also pursuing additional funding to allow it to expand to be able to accommodate 70 young people which Þorbjörn felt was a realistic limit as he felt that it was important to know each young person in order to build positive relationships and meet their individual needs and any larger number would make this impossible.

The workshops included:

Teaching room – where students can work at their own pace with support from a tutor, on their maths, Icelandic, Danish and English with the aim of them sitting the matriculation exams that will enable them to access the education system again if that is what they want to do.

IT centre – where students can gain skills in using a variety of software packages as well as real work experience. This department has contracts to produce blank credit and security cards, document bindings, wallets, labels and the design and production of booklets and packaging. The work is for a variety of companies who contract to Fjölsmiðjan who deliver the work to a high standard and at competitive prices. This gives the students the experience of having to produce quality goods within given timescales and specifications.

Woodworking Workshop – where students undertake a variety of tasks overseen by the tutor to enable them to develop carpentry skills. This department accepts a number of work contracts from building and designing wood goods to maintenance and repair contracts. These contracts are secured by offering the work and goods at competitive prices so students have the opportunity to do everything from turning decorative finials for the University of Iceland flagpoles, to building and finishing wooden houses from children's playhouses right up to temporary site offices (for electrical companies setting up power stations all over Iceland) and summer houses, as well as specialist orders for doors and windows. This enabled young people to see the process from design to finishing and develop skills to industry standard as well as providing some work placement opportunities putting the bigger buildings together on site. The revenue generated also helped the centre provide up to date and well maintained tools and equipment for the young people to use.

Automobile Workshop – where students run a valeting service for local people as well as servicing the contract for Toyota used car sales (to prepare cars to a high standard for resale) and the Health Authority's service and private vehicles. The tutor explained that they are actually turning work away at the moment as the demand is high due to a good reputation and competitive prices. He stressed that it was important for the customers and young people that a professional standard of work was maintained and felt that over committing the department would be counter productive. A number of young people had

gone on to get jobs with Toyota and local car and truck dealerships through their work at the centre. The workshop was brightly painted with well lit bays and new or well maintained equipment and tools which the tutor felt was important to the standard of work and the self worth of the students (the same was said above by the tutor in the woodworking workshop).

The Kitchen – this was a working kitchen in which the young people could train with a qualified chef. The kitchen catered for all the students at the centre as well as a number of surrounding businesses who booked lunch sittings at the facilities and on average, they served around 80 customers per day. The students were involved in all aspects of hygiene, planning and budgeting menus, preparing and serving meals and cleaning up at the end of the day. The fact that it was a working kitchen meant that the young people got a real sense of what it is like to work in a busy kitchen as well as acquiring basic cooking skills and knowledge.

The Trash Company – a recent development, this department was proving to be a success already. It takes in old computers, electrical and white goods to recycle or restore. The items are first examined and tested to identify if they are salvageable – if they aren't they are stripped for parts and if they are, they are mended by replacing parts, tested for electrical safety and then sold through local outlets, the profits of which go into a community fund to help those with physical and mental illness. There is also the opportunity for young people at the project who are living independently to buy these goods to furnish their accommodation at negligible rates. The department also had a contract to recycle computer memory chips and motherboards which are removed from the machines and sent to Denmark for processing. The students therefore had the opportunity to develop electrical skills in diagnosis, repair and testing.

The centre also had a contract for packaging dried food goods which also allowed an insight into processing and packaging, again generating revenue that is reinvested in the centre.

In the future, Þorbjörn is hoping to develop two further work areas:

The Fishing Boat - he hopes that the centre can acquire a small fishing boat and run day trips for people as well as being used to give young people experience in commercial fishing, ideally using the fish caught to supply the kitchen and to sell on to other outlets. The Guest House – there is a possibility of acquiring another disused hospital building which could be turned into a guest house to give young people training in hospitality services as they would be responsible, with the support of a tutor, for running all aspects of the guest house on a shift basis, as a profit making business.

Summary

This visit was a real joy as the centre was welcoming, well organized and all of the young people were engrossed in the tasks they were doing. As work based learning is less developed in Iceland than in the UK there were some lessons to be learned on both sides:

- There was a sense of it being a ‘real’ workplace, albeit a very supportive one and it was clear that the links built with industry were crucial in giving it that feel as the students were aware that the work they were doing was for real companies, working to real deadlines and the quality of the work had to be to a certain standard which prepared them well for the reality of a job. This had not come easily and required a concerted effort at lobbying the Association of Industry on an ongoing basis to lay the ground work for good will from local and national businesses to get involved and award contracts to the centre. However, once in place, the competitive rates and high standard of work produced have enabled further contracts to be secured and others to be maintained. Despite the fact that funding had been hard to find initially and was subject to ongoing review and application, there was an obvious ethos of investment in the centre and all the staff commented on the importance of good working environments, challenging tasks and good tools in enabling these disadvantaged young people to value themselves and accept that they could be a success at something. This is different to training providers in the UK who have underdeveloped links in terms of delivering real work contracts as part of the experience compared to this centre. The investment and revenue generation is in contrast to many training providers in the UK who, by nature of the short term, contract/target based, funding available to run such provision, are discouraged from developing investment in premises and equipment and unable to plan long term or short term development because of the short term and low level funding available. It does, however, highlight that with a bit of initiative and a lot of commitment and perseverance, these improvements are attainable.

- Young people’s income from the benefits system was higher (even taking into account the higher cost of living) in comparison to the low training allowance available to this client group on training programs in the UK. There were not the issues surrounding the knock on effect on family benefits because the young person received benefits for training. Because the training benefits were substantial enough to live on, the staff at the centre commented that this too contributed to young people’s self confidence and sense of worth as they felt they were being fairly paid for a fair week’s work, reinforcing their commitment to the training and work that they were doing. This was evidenced in the high level of attendance, low level of drop outs and high percentages of positive outcomes. What also helped this situation was the approach of the staff towards those young people who were struggling with various issues, whether it was getting up on time to get there, controlling their anger or additional specialist needs. Because the staff knew each young person well and had built positive relationships with them, when difficulties did arise they were resolved via reasoning and talking, offering counseling and further support and by offering a cooling off period where this was the best option for the young person. This also enabled the young people to develop social, communication, reasoning and decision making skills as part of the experience and difficulties were revisited with the young people in terms of helping them identify how they can deal with similar situations in a better way and to learn from this as there is no 2nd chance in the real world. By setting firm

boundaries with the young people to begin with, they knew where they stood, what would and wouldn't be tolerated and that they needed to be committed as the centre had contracts of work to fulfill and could not afford to carry anyone. Thus, timekeeping and sickness reporting were strictly enforced and the young people respected this not only because they would lose money but also because it affected other members of the group on whom there would be additional pressure to complete contracted work.

- The centre is currently working with the Ministry of Education on issue of accreditation. Because Iceland does not have a work based learning qualification structure such as NVQ's, Þorbjörn is hoping to negotiate the accreditation of points towards the school system for skills and learning gained at the centre by young people who wish to return to education. At the moment the centre can help young people gain their basic skills diploma (Icelandic, Danish, English and maths) so they can access upper secondary school but there is no recognition other than that given by the centre, of the skills and experience that young people are gaining in the vocational fields. Having such a strict system means that many young people who are not suited to the educational environment really have little alternative, apart from the opportunities offered by this centre. On the other hand, having such a clearly defined accreditation system means that qualifications are given equal weight and recognized by all companies within the country whereas, although in the UK we have the advantage of a range of accreditation bodies, programs and qualifications, employers and educational establishments can get confused and therefore undervalue or fail to recognize certain attainments and qualifications in favour of those with which they are most familiar and comfortable.

Although it would be foolish to assume that these ideas can simply be transposed to the UK (largely due to the social and economic structure of Iceland, the sense of community and identity within their society and the strong work ethic which forms an important part of this and the fact that the total population stands at a little under 300,000 for the whole island) it would also be a shame if some of the ethos and activities that have been proven to work were written off without consideration under the auspices of the above differences between the UK and Iceland. I feel there are still some valuable lessons that could be learnt.

Tuesday 11th May – p.m.

Nemacode

Nema is a private company run by an established and respected guidance counsellor, Ásta Ragnarsdóttir (Chief of Counselling), and her husband, Valgeir Gudjónsson (Chief of Development) who are developing a number of projects and tools to assist the guidance counsellor in his/her work. We were welcomed with more coffee and Icelandic fayre then introduced to the main project, Nemacode, which is a European project funded by LEONARDO and being piloted in 70 schools across Iceland, Germany, the Czech Republic, and in partnership with Careers Europe. The company is developing this project and delivering training for it all over the EU. Nemacode is an interest inventory based on the RIASEC hexagon model developed by Dr Holland.

Nemacode is a web or paper based interest inventory that the client can work on unaided (or with support from a guidance counsellor) and will produce a profile in written and visual forms detailing scores and tendencies and appropriate interpretation in terms of careers that may match such tendencies. The inventory looks at positive and negative feelings towards past and present jobs or tasks and encourages the client to formulate a vision of where they want to be in 5-10 years time. The process gives the client an insight into the process of reasoning that brings them to the end result.

The RIASEC model, on which this is based, works on the premise that basic interest areas can be divided into 6 categories:

Realistic – for example, working with tools, machines, nature, animals and plants

Investigative – concerned with knowledge, study and research

Artistic – relating to creative activities, art and ideas

Social – focusing on working with people, communication and interaction

Enterprising – concerning finance, entrepreneurship, politics and the media

Conventional – relating to structure, systems and routine

Ásta has developed a further interpretation of this system, based on her experience as a guidance counsellor, by subdividing the categories into right brained and left brained tendencies. The right is characterized by the mental, the abstract, the experimental, the unexplored and change whereas the left tends towards the material, the concrete, the stable, the explored and the proven. Therefore, when this is overlaid onto the RIASEC hexagon, the following tendencies emerge:

Realistic – left – technique and the technical, machinery, tools, technology

- right – biology and nature, animals and plants

Investigative - left – working with knowledge that is already known and academic study

- right – generating new knowledge through research and experiments

Artistic - left – artistic creativity, interpretation, production, recognized art style

- right – creative thinking and ideas, breaking new ground, new styles

Social - left – work with people at surface level, cooperation, service

- right – working in-depth with people, feelings, caring, healing, informing

Enterprising - left – driven by money and results, business, management, influence

- right – selling ideas and concepts rather than products (latter = left)
- Conventional - left – calculations, working with data, bureaucracy, administration
- right – rules, traditions, customs, law and order, the military

It is also possible to link those tendencies which lie next to each other within the hexagon e.g. the right conventional with the left realistic. This provides a comprehensive and empowering way for the young person to order their preferences in a logical way and use this information to make decisions about career and educational choices. It also encourages self examination and understanding through the process of reasoning through which results are arrived at.

Nemastudy is another tool being worked on by the company which is primarily a study aid. By likening the human brain to the computer, learning can be understood as a procedure involving the processing of information, the saving of that information, the ordering of knowledge and efficient retrieval of information. It is a computer programme that allows the student to store information and knowledge in a clearly defined structure of subjects, chapters, themes and memos, reinforcing the structured ordering of information to enable effective study and retrieval of data. It also allows the student to develop and understanding of the links between information – by making links effective learning and retrieval is enabled. The idea is that as the student gains new knowledge/ information, it can be stored in the programme and, when it needs to be revised or retrieved, information can easily be found and the relationships between different chunks of knowledge can be exploited to aid this.

Both these projects seem to have immense potential in helping students and young people be effective in their learning and to make reasoned and well suited decisions in terms of future work, training, education or careers. They act as support tools for the student and guidance counsellor to enable the time spent to be as effective and useful as possible.

Summary

Ásta and Valgeir's enthusiasm and commitment to these projects was boundless and made it an interesting and intriguing visit, prompting me to want to look into these tools further in terms of the value they could add to the work with my clients. NemaCode is a simple but effective way of getting young people to think about their strengths and comfort zones and how these can be used to make positive life and career decisions. It also develops self awareness and understanding of why they feel happier or more confident in certain settings and situations rather than others, thereby identifying both strengths and areas for improvement. This is a useful tool which, alongside others such as Kudos and the APIR wheel, could add another, infinitely useful dimension to the information available on which to base decision making. It would be great if there was an opportunity to pilot this in the UK as it appears to be equally applicable to school, college, community and social settings as well as to any age range.

Wednesday 12th May – a.m.

University of Iceland – MA in Career Counselling – Department of Social Science

We visited Dr Guðbjörg Vilhjálmsdóttir at the University of Iceland for an insight into the courses available there and an introduction to counselling in Iceland. She began by explaining that in 1974, legislation introduced the Scandinavian model of education to Iceland. Secondary schools deliver compulsory education to ages 6-16 and upper secondary schools provide post-16 education in academic and vocational areas with core subjects of Maths, Icelandic, Danish and English. Post 16 education, the equivalent to our Further Education, takes 4 years rather than 2, as in the UK. This means that the students are more mature and more likely to make a success of university study or work but it also means that there is a significant drop out rate where students for a number of reasons, fail to complete the full 4 years.

Guðbjörg works closely with Jonina who we met on Monday and explained about the history and current role of the Icelandic Association of Careers Counsellors. It was founded in 1981 by 7 interested and qualified people, 6 of whom worked in upper secondary schools and one in a university. By 1987 they had 15 members all of whom were committed to developing the profession and training available in Iceland. In 1990, the first postgraduate diploma in guidance counselling was made available through the University of Iceland primarily aimed at school guidance counsellors. It was not until 1992 and the unemployment crisis, where unemployment remained at around 5% for several years, that the idea of employment counsellors evolved. Before this time, employment services were very basic but 4 years later, there was a shift to computerized systems and a more developed office and service which reinforced the need for guidance counselling in this setting. From this came the first distance learning course funded by the National Employment Agency but, as there were not enough employment counsellors to fill the course, it was opened up to school guidance counsellors. Guðbjörg commented that this was actually very productive as it promoted discussion between guidance workers in different sectors and enabled students to build up useful and productive networks with colleagues in other sectors. The University is now developing a similar course for guidance counsellors working in firms and industry.

Guidance counsellors and graduates who wish to access the distance learning, Diploma or Masters programme offered by the University need to have an undergraduate degree in teaching, psychology or sociology. The current distance learning and diploma routes are designed for people who are interested in or already doing some guidance work as part of their role. The fees for the Diploma have been borne by the University and the distance learning course has been funded, until this year, by the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Education. However, with regard to the latter, the lack of funding from the original source has prompted discussion around how the programme can continue to be provided and financed. Consideration is currently being given to the charging of tuition fees which is not current practice in Iceland. To date, 160 counsellors have completed the Diploma, involving assignments, practice and assessment, 70% of who were already working as counsellors in schools or employment services, and there are 28 people on the

course this year. The new Masters programme, starting in September 2004, is available to those who have already completed the Diploma and is made up of the following units:

- Employment Counselling (compulsory),
- Methods (compulsory)
- One optional course from either social sciences faculty or any of the units available at the University that delivers teacher training
- Thesis – research project into a specific area of counseling such as multicultural counseling, sex and sexuality counseling, substance misuse, adolescence, careers guidance, psychology etc

There are 27 people enrolled on the course for this year and it is envisaged that once the 160 people who have completed the diploma have completed this one year masters, the two courses will be combined into a 2 year postgraduate programme.

Summary

The development of this provision is contributing to the recognition of guidance counselling as a robust, ethical and recognised profession and means that undergraduates can train in this field without having to leave Iceland to gain postgraduate qualifications. It also seems that mixing guidance counsellors from different settings makes the learning experience all the more beneficial and has produced useful and efficient networks between sectors. This has also provided a discussion forum for the profession and the Association can make use of this in developing ethical and professional guidelines and standards. It has prompted me to consider if there are any postgraduate distance learning courses in the UK that may be relevant to my continuing professional development and, once I have completed my NVQ4 in Advice and Guidance, I will look into the available opportunities. It also suggests that, where possible, there are real benefits from training workers together from different organizations who work with young people as this seems to promote networking links and a better understanding of each others' roles and remits.

Wednesday 12th May – p.m.

Mennt – Educate Iceland

Mennt, or Educate Iceland, is an organization that was established in 1998 to create a forum for cooperation between the educational and employment sectors to promote the development of vocational and educational training opportunities. It was founded by representatives from upper secondary schools, universities and trade unions and the Federation of Icelandic employers and receives no government funding. Instead, the 70 partners of Mennt all pay an annual fee and the company also applies for external funding for specific projects, which means that the company can stay neutral and independent rather than being tied to politics via state or municipality funding. Members include trade unions, associations of employers, universities, upper secondary schools, vocational schools, industry training boards and local authorities as well as foundations and companies involved or interested in educational issues.

Aðalheiður Jónsdóttir (General Director) and Tryggvi Thayer (Project Manager) explained to us that the focus is on cooperation, the transfer of knowledge and active involvement of all sectors in developing 2nd and 3rd level education and lifelong learning. This means the company gathers and distributes information on learning, work and vocational opportunities, provides services for members in terms of supporting them in the development of employees and acts as a forum to discuss and tackle common issues both at national and international levels. The company aims to build an opportunity database to redress the difficulty of finding opportunities outside the formal school system but it is proving difficult to source the information and with the strict data legislation in Iceland, it has proved difficult to convince private employers and training providers to see the benefit in a central database.

The main projects include the following:

At National Level

- Organisation of events - e.g. Week for Lifelong Learning, learner awards ceremonies
- Information gathering and distribution - maintaining a central library and database of information on education and training, acting as information brokers
- Educational opportunities database – a central reference point for educational and vocational opportunities outside of the formal school structure
- Policy development – working with policy makers over matters of vocational and educational training and lifelong learning
- Project management – for example facilitation of dialogue between the Ministry of Education and established occupational councils, servicing various committees, running a school project around lifelong learning workshops funded by a grant from the vocational training council, and evaluating results
- Task Group organization – organizing and facilitating focus groups around particular issues and tasks
- Membership services – support, information and advice for members

- Best practice awards – coordinating nominations, judging and the awards ceremonies

At International level

- National coordinator for CEDEFOP (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Education and Training) – providing a documentary information network, organizing study visits and supporting publishing activities
- LEONARDO support and service unit – promoting the programme, assistance and counselling to promoters, dissemination of project results
- Europass national contact point – information, advice and support in implementing transparency tool for the validation of vocational training gained abroad as part of studies in Iceland and to motivate and promote mobility
- Participation in European Networks – providing information and brokerage services, project organization and management

The work is partly undertaken through cooperation between the different members as well as with non-members, nationally and internationally. The target group for the work is diverse and in line with the aim of each project; some operations are aimed towards the public, some towards those working in the field of education and some towards members only.

Summary

Mennt is an important and pivotal organization in the development of cooperation between education and business as well as promoting lifelong learning and the development of vocational training and opportunities for those in work, especially those who have limited formal education. By encouraging and facilitating dialogue between those involved in education, 14 occupational councils, policy makers from the Ministry of Education and trade unions, they have all the major players on board that can make a difference. By maintaining an independent stance they are able to mediate and suggest ways of working more effectively together to generate further opportunities in work, learning and training. This does however, demand a high level of commitment and effort to make the process happen and the European dimension is crucial in terms of using ideas and information to see how they might be applied to make the system in Iceland work better for people. It would be interesting to find out if such an organization or forum exists in the UK and, if not, whether commitment could be obtained to make it a viable project as it often seems that there is more work that could be done in bridging the gap between the formal education system, vocational training available through training providers and the real world of work opportunities and skills needs. It often proves difficult to secure quality work based opportunities for the harder to help young people as often employers do not want to commit to the support and time that would be necessary for the young person to make a success of the opportunities. By employing a service such as Mennt, the support for employers and training providers might make the difference in securing employers' commitment to investing in opportunities for young people and supporting their personal and career development.

Wednesday 12th May – p.m.

Fræðslumiðstöð atvinnulífsins – The Education and Training Service Centre

The Education and Training Service Centre is based in the same building as Mennt and provides a different but complimentary service, focusing on raising access to and achievement of adult education and vocational training, particularly for those who have not completed the upper secondary level of education which accounts for 40% of people in the labour market. We met with Ingibjörg Guðmundsdóttir who is the General Manager of the service which was founded in 2002 by the Icelandic Federation of Labour and the Confederation of Icelandic Employers. It is a non profit making organization that now has a contract with the Ministry of Education to support the work being done to raise education levels, improve people's position in the labour market and to facilitate recognition of competences gained in work to shorten study periods.

The company employs 5 staff including Ingibjörg (who has a psychology and adult education background), Fjóla (who is a careers counsellor) as well as a psychologist who has worked with education providers and two others, one of whom has an education background and the other who has worked in the trade and industry sector. By having such a range of backgrounds, this enables the service to draw on a wide range of experience and knowledge in delivering the Centre's objectives which include:

- 1) to promote the availability of education for individuals in the labour market who have limited formal education by
 - performing education needs analyses for companies, professions and individuals in the target group
 - to describe available education in curricula
 - to cooperate with education bodies such as lifelong learning centres, on the implementation of education supply
- 2) to have assessments performed of the education supply and real professional competence in the labour market
 - to ensure recognition of skills and knowledge acquired in training courses
 - to ensure recognition of skills acquired through experience, self study, etc
 - to shorten study periods for those who want to study
- 3) to increase the quality of adult education and vocational training in the labour market
 - to develop a centre of knowledge on adult education
 - to train teachers at adult education centres
- 4) to encourage study
 - to develop education and career counselling services in the labour market
 - to develop education records
 - to disseminate information about study and skills
 - to collect and disseminate information about available programs of study for the target group

The centre therefore has a number of different roles:

- to develop a network of small education providers and industry bodies such as sector training providers (e.g. metal industry, electrical industry) with the aim of developing cooperation and making the best and most effective use of resources as well as establishing funds from the state and partners for training unskilled people in the work force.
- working with unskilled workers who have not finished their upper secondary education, to perform needs analyses and source, match and make educational offers to this client group. A contract has been developed with providers to make offers transparent, enabling the centre to gain some ownership of the process by being a portal through which opportunities are advertised and help is accessed. Offers through this service are usually free to the employee as the centre will normally source funding and work with trade unions and employers to negotiate study time for the employee. By working in partnership with education providers and lifelong learning centres, tailor made courses can be developed to benefit both the employer and the employee which can include basic and key skills as well as job specific and vocational elements.
- working with the Ministry of Education on developing accreditation for work skills and experience in relation to the school system to cut study time and recognize achievements. Until now, the only accreditation has been through the formal schooling system but the organization is working towards identifying ways to develop evidence and work based qualifications (they are looking at models used across the EU in developing this work, including NVQ structures). The centre is also working in partnership to develop a quality standards system across educational opportunities and provision within the labour market which involves supporting training providers in developing an awareness of the value of continuing training and lifelong learning.
- identifying and approaching the target group – i.e. those over 20 who have not completed upper secondary schooling (it is targeted at this age range because, as Ingibjörg explained, vocational schooling is based on a modular approach and students can dip in and out of this education – it is easier for 16-20 year olds to re-access this provision than for those over 20). This is no easy feat given the restrictions on sharing data under Icelandic personal protection legislation but the centre, by developing links with trade unions and social partners such as community organizations, is improving its ability to identify and get to its target client group. The use of guidance counselling skills is crucial in this process and the counsellor employed by the centre goes out into industry sectors and firms to work with employees and guidance counsellors directly employed by certain companies (although 75% of companies have 1-5 employees and it is only the larger companies who employ their own counsellor – this gives an idea of the scale of the operation in providing advice and information to the smaller employers). The aim of this is to ensure that the client group have access to

independent and impartial advice as well as being introduced to opportunities for development.

- developing training for trade union representatives so they can be workplace learning representatives and promote lifelong learning, give advice and guidance to employees regarding opportunities, skills, qualifications and accreditation.
- developing specific programs for immigrant workers to enable the mapping of transferable skills, integration into society, culture and developing language skills alongside an understanding of the labour market system and their legal rights

Summary

Once again, this centre is at the cutting edge of developing accreditation, quality assurance and vocational qualification frameworks in Iceland. It brings together significant and powerful organizations in order to promote dialogue and development of opportunities outside the formal education system for less qualified people in the labour market, working in partnership with sector skills organizations, employers, trade unions, education providers and the Ministry of Education. Thus the centre provides an important service to a range of organizations and individuals. Much of the work is centred around developing accreditation and work based learning opportunities for people aged 20 and over and, although in the UK we already have a framework for accrediting learning and competences in the form of NVQs and others e.g. City and Guilds, there are still a few lessons that could be learned from the work being done in Iceland.

The work of this organization is made possible by a genuine commitment of the range of partners involved to improving the education and position of the client group in the labour market and, by involving those at decision making level and consulting with the employees regarding their needs and aspirations, it seeks to bring these two perspectives together for the benefit of both employers and employees as well as the economy in general. Although we have adult guidance services in the UK, they are usually funded via tenders and bids for short term funding and the level and requirements of the funding obtained means that the in-depth service available to those under 20 is not able to be provided to those over 20. By training trade union representatives and senior staff within companies to encourage, motivate and support staff in identifying and taking up vocational and development opportunities, it means that offers can be matched more accurately and effectively to benefit employees and employers and people in the labour market have better and wider access to information, advice and guidance (as some adult guidance in the UK can only be accessed by those who have not yet achieved a level 2 qualification). This forum and cooperative also provides a vehicle to discuss and overcome common issues and barriers faced by partners in ensuring the workforce has access to valuable and useful development opportunities.

Thursday 13th May – a.m.

University of Reykjavik – Spiderweb, WATCH and Counselling activities

Reykjavik University was established in 1998, making it a relatively new institution. It is a private university which means that fees are higher (e.g. 99,000 Icelandic krona per semester compared to the University of Iceland who's fees are 36,000 Icelandic krona per year) but there is financial assistance available for those students who could not afford to access programs without additional financial support towards fees and subsistence. The University is housed in a purpose-built building incorporating a range of state of the art facilities including computer suites, library and access cards which permit students to access these facilities 24 hours a day. As it is a new institution, there has been the scope to develop new systems, courses and ways of working.

The organisation's mission is to increase the competitiveness of Icelandic industries, businesses and institutions and the objectives are:

- to graduate students who will be in demand in both the domestic and international workplace
- to prepare students for positions of leadership in businesses and in the community at large
- to integrate curricula between departments in order to give students the widest possible horizon of education
- to ensure a practical component in education and to cooperate and work closely with industry
- to develop the curriculum continuously and maintain initiative in the changing environment

The University currently has 3 schools:

The School of Computer Science – offering undergraduate and postgraduate courses in computer science including distance learning and study while working options. Current international and research activities include image retrieval systems, semantic caching, web-workload generation and the G3E project.

The School of Business – offering undergraduate and postgraduate courses in business administration, resource management and finance and investment management, including study while working options. It also offers executive education by plugging applicants into existing courses or developing tailor made packages to meet the needs of applicants already working in the business and finance fields. Current international and research activities include the Centre for Research on Innovation and Entrepreneurship, the GEM consortium and the Cranet Network.

The School of Law – offering undergraduate and postgraduate courses in Law. It also works with the European Law Institute and houses the European Documentation Centre.

In 2005, the University will also be offering education studies and engineering courses. The University currently has around 1300 students.

There is also a Student Counselling service operating within the university, specializing in helping students improve their study methods and efficiency, increasing awareness of abilities, opinions and interests so they can be used effectively in academia and the work place. Our hosts were Björg Birgisdóttir (Director of International Programs and Student Counselling) and Karen Björnsdóttir (Student Counsellor). Both had a background based in teaching before completing postgraduate qualifications in guidance counselling, gaining considerable experience through practice in this field. Karen studied at the University of Iceland, completing the Diploma in Guidance Counselling after completing her teaching degree and now counsels students at the University as well as taking part in international professional exchanges. Björg studied in the US before becoming a counsellor. She now works as a full time counsellor at the University as well as overseeing distance learning programs and the international office. The latter has enabled her to develop and enable the University to take part in a range of European and international projects such as:

SPIDERWEB (Support Program In Development Represented on the WEB)

This is a 3 year pilot project supported by the Leonardo Da Vinci Community Action Programme, addressing approaches to target the drop out population in Europe. The project began in November 2001 and has been piloted by a range of partners including Icelandic universities, schools and lifelong learning centres as well as European partners such as universities based in Ireland, Finland, Greece, Scotland and Slovakia. There is a conference being organized for October this year to disseminate results and take the pilot forward as further Leonardo funding has been obtained to extend the project.

Spiderweb offers a holistic approach in identifying the drop out population, analysing their individual needs and implementing support programs. The goals of the project are:

- identifying drop out groups in educational/vocational settings
- detecting students at risk of dropping out early, by using a screening technique
- providing comprehensive support programs, assisting individuals and developing positive self-attitude and fulfilling their educational and career goals
- providing training packages for potential facilitators
- developing an accessible website with information, research and articles concerning the drop out population

The outcomes of the project have been:

- the creation of an information website which gives access to an overview of best practice and projects in Europe and the US concerning issues of youth at risk and drop out. It contains information targeted to educational/vocational counsellors and facilitators in learning enterprises
- the development of a screening technique which identifies factors that predict the risk of individuals dropping out at the early stages of the drop out process. Risk factors include lack of study goals/skills, lack of concentration, poor attendance

- and inability to complete assignments on time. It is underpinned by the idea that the sooner risk factors are detected, the greater the chance of implementing adequate and effective strategies to support students in continuing and completing their studies.
- the development of two support and prevention programs available for different at-risk groups at various stages - Assertiveness training and WATCH. Both programs are designed to help young people develop positive self-esteem, creative thinking and careers satisfaction, to enable young people to learn effective decision making skills and understand the importance of planning for the future and to raise awareness among educational and vocational staff about the drop out population.
 - the production of training packages and handbooks for educational, vocational and guidance counsellors to enable them to implement the tools and programs generated by the project.

The target group of the project is twofold:

Participants – young people at risk of dropping out of school at all levels and individuals in need of support to reenter the educational or vocational system

Facilitators – educational, vocational and guidance counsellors working with the drop out population as well as human resource managers, administrators and specialists

WATCH (What Alternatives? Thinking-Coping-Hoping)

WATCH is one of the support and prevention packages which form part of the Spiderweb project and has been developed from Björg's Master's thesis and piloted in 70 schools from secondary up to university level in Iceland. Following positive feedback from this, a Leonardo grant was secured to enable the pilot to be rolled out to European partners.

The main goals of the programme are to:

- provide potential drop outs with a support system to develop positive attitudes
- prepare students for further academic work and to teach them skills to make decision and plan for the future
- assist individuals to choose appropriate coping strategies when facing difficult moments in life

This programme has been piloted in a group work setting and the each session involves students in setting goals for each week and reflecting on accomplishments towards these goals in subsequent sessions. The programme sessions are laid out as follows:

Session 1 - Introduction (group rule setting and introduction of programme)

Session 2 - Study skills – managing your time

Session 3 - Stress

Session 4 - Anxiety

Session 5 - Procrastination

Session 6 - Lifestyle

Session 7 - Study skills – making notes

Session 8 - Peers

Session 9 - My strengths and weaknesses

Session 10 – Health
Session 11 – The internet
Session 12 – Decision making
Session 13 – Self esteem
Session 14 – The future
Session 15 – Reflection and follow-up

It is aimed at young people who are at various transition points – between secondary and upper secondary schools, between upper secondary schools and university and those returning to education.

Preliminary evaluation of the 500 students who have completed the WATCH programme is positive and the outcomes for those students have been:

- satisfaction with the programme
- progress towards establishing goals and the steps needed to fulfill them
- lower levels of anxiety
- a sense of belonging to a positive group and the mutual exchange of personal support
- the identification of clear plans for their future

There was a real sense of some ground breaking work being achieved within this project and the Student Counselling Centre at the University. There were significant and productive partnerships with other European organizations in assessing the impact and effectiveness of these new ways of working with the drop out population, enabling a full and meaningful evaluation of the use of such programs in different educational settings, societies and cultures.

Summary

This visit was very interesting and the project that we were introduced to, although aimed at those at risk of dropping out of education, could equally be applied (with minor modification) to working with young people who have already disengaged with education or training. It will be interesting to see the results of the pilot and evaluation to be presented at the final conference in October but initial feedback seems to suggest that the screening technique and support programs could be applied successfully in the work of Connexions Personal Advisers working in schools (in identifying and offering early prevention of drop outs) as well as in the community (in enabling those young people who are already disengaged to reaccess education and training provision). Although the WATCH programme is designed for a group work setting, there are pertinent sessions and elements which, with a little work, could be adapted to one to one work with clients and would sit alongside and complement existing assessment tools such as the APIR wheel and software packages such as Kudos. This seems to have massive potential in supporting the work being done with disaffected and disadvantaged young people as well as preparing at-risk young people for the significant transition points that they face. I would like to look into the possibility of attending the conference in October as I feel that this could make a real and positive difference to the work that I do with my clients.

Friday 14th May – a.m.

Götusmiðan – The Street Workshop

The Street Workshop is a therapeutic centre for young people aged 14-20 who are recovering from drug and alcohol addiction. It was started by a recovering addict in 1998 using community funds and has now developed into a recognized facility for post-detoxification / rehabilitation provision, funded mostly by the Government Agency for Child Protection who work closely with Social Services (funding 13 of 15 places, the other two being funded by contributions from the community and industry). It is set some way out of Reykjavik in Árvellir at the bottom of a mountain and consists of a complex of 3 buildings – the main centre which houses staff offices, meeting rooms, teaching rooms, a canteen and communal areas, the residential unit where the 15 students live (including bedrooms and communal living areas), and the therapy centre where music, art, drama therapy, cognitive behavioural therapy and counselling are delivered. The centre also has a dog and a number of rabbits and horses. The animals provide additional therapy for the young people, in particular the young people are responsible for looking after and feeding the animals and they can engage in horse therapy by grooming, feeding and learning horsemanship skills.

Referrals come to the centre through the government agency and social services who liaise with the centre over the support needs of young people who are nearing completion of rehabilitation and detoxification programs provided by the Health Service as well as those struggling with their issues in the community, where the young person is under 18 years old. Where they are over 18, referrals can come via other agencies, the community, the family or the young person themselves. Our host, Elísabet Gísladóttir, explained that around 90% of students that come to the centre have had a negative experience of school and many have had special education needs, emotional and behavioural difficulties and tend to come from broken families. They deal with young people who have a range of substance misuse issues from poly drug use, drug and alcohol addiction combined and those young people who have used substances for a significant number of years. Elísabet also identified that some young people came from a background of generations who have lived on social support and they lack the values and motivation needed to turn their situation around. This is tackled through the programme and there is an emphasis in involving the family and parents of students to attend regular meetings and to get involved in supporting the recovery of their young people – it is sometimes as much about teaching parents the skills and techniques to do this successfully as teaching the young people how to make positive decisions and reclaim their lives.

70% of their intake is from Reykjavik but there are still significant issues for those living in the remoter parts of the island. This is because those communities are close knit and small so many people know each other, resulting in the exiling from local communities of those young people who have developed substance misuse issues. 20% of the young people at the centre had come directly from living on the streets, some as a result of moving to the city following such community exile. As the Red Cross currently run the only homelessness shelter in Reykjavik, the centre has also developed links with this

organization in terms of identifying young people in need of support and in planning transitions from the residential setting to living back in the outside world. However, unfortunately this facility is set to close soon.

The centre has 70 employees providing 24 hour residential support, specialist services and therapies and ongoing mentoring for young people who have left or are still at the centre. Elisabet pointed out that experience had shown the importance of a key worker or mentor (each of whom is responsible for no more than 3-4 young people) as it provides an opportunity over time of developing a positive relationship with the student and offer a consistent point of support and contact throughout their time at the centre as well as the transition back to life outside the centre. On arriving at the centre a psychologist works with the young person to devise an individual plan based on their needs. The students have a busy daily schedule which starts at around 8 in the morning and finishes at around 10.30 at night. It includes cleaning duties, house meetings, support with developing skills and motivation to reengage in educational activities, independent living skills, budgeting skills, individual and group therapy sessions, Alcoholics and Narcotics Anonymous meetings, outdoor pursuits at the weekend and fulfilling house responsibilities e.g. animal care. This keeps the young people busy and aims to give them the skills and knowledge to make positive changes. The programme emphasizes individual responsibility for decisions and it is crucial that the students are willing to create a new life and self-identity without drugs.

The length of time that young people spend at the centre depends on their progress and is negotiated by mutual agreement. At house meetings, tokens are given to reward positive behaviour and achievements but they can also be lost – this is done in the context of the discussion of feelings and examination and reflection on events to enable the students to learn from any misdemeanors. Where a young person absconds from the centre, their room is held open for up to a week in case they change their minds and come back (which is usually the case!). As there is a large waiting list to access this provision, the students are aware that if they abscond and do not return within a week, they will have to go to the bottom of the waiting list again. When it is agreed that students are ready to leave, they work with their mentor to produce an After Treatment Programme which lays out plans and support arrangements for their transition back into the community. It identifies who will provide what support, a commitment to attending weekly group and individual sessions, many of which take place at Hitt Husið (involving both support and activities as part of ‘The Train’ project), and can also involve introducing the young person to organizations such as Fjölsmiðjan who can organize training and work placements.

This transition is crucial and is often where the young people struggle to manage themselves for a variety of reasons including, returning to their old peer group, still facing previous issues such as homelessness or unemployment, struggling to see themselves as anything other than a drug user in the context of the community, struggling to change other people perceptions of and interactions with them where others are less than supportive of the positive changes they are trying to make and sustain. However, the centre does have a good success rate as students attend on a voluntary basis and are provided with ongoing support through a mentor. The centre also has an emergency

accommodation room for previous students who fear a sudden relapse – they can call the centre and come back immediately where they feel they are in danger of using drugs again. However, if they have started misusing substances by the time they call, they have to come back via the detoxification / rehabilitation route. The success of the centre is reflected in the imminent move to new, larger premises an hour and a half out of Reykjavik which will provide space for them to take more referrals.

It was great to meet the students as well as key members of staff, all of whom were friendly, welcoming and curious as to how such issues are dealt with in the UK. The students were inquisitive and most spoke very good English and we engaged in conversation about their experiences of the centre as well as discussing music tastes and hobbies that they enjoyed. This was a real privilege as they welcomed us into their home without question and were keen to show us around and tell us what they had gained from their time there, all of which was positive.

Summary

The facilities and approach of the centre were refreshing and wholly positive. It gave a real insight into the reality of the problems generated for these young people where drug and alcohol abuse has been the coping strategy chosen to deal with a range of negative experiences and situations. There were common themes emerging between these young people in Iceland and those young people with whom I have worked who have similar issues in the UK. The risk factors show similarities – past negative educational experiences, low social and reasoning skills, emotional and behavioural difficulties, social isolation, homelessness, histories of abuse and neglect, special educational needs and difficult family histories. Despite the marked differences between British and Icelandic society (the latter having a much smaller population, more close-knit communities and lack of housing for rent, to give some examples), it appears that these young people chose similar coping strategies for similar reasons. The provision of such a facility plays a big role in enabling these young people to turn their lives around and, being funded by the government means there is not the uncertainty and lack of development which sometime results in short term and tenuous funding bases. Something similar would be a welcome addition to facilities available in the UK for this vulnerable client group. Similarly, it is the transition back into their previous environment that can prove problematic following residential provision and it reinforces the importance of well planned and efficiently coordinated and implemented support plans to enable young people to adjust and adapt back into previous environments without them falling back on their old coping strategies. Central to this is the consistency provided by a key worker or mentor with whom the young person has already built a positive relationship and is available for ongoing contact and support.

Friday 14th May – p.m.

Borgarholtsskóli

This comprehensive upper secondary school was based in the outskirts of Reykjavik. It is a fairly new school with state of the art facilities, providing both academic and vocational post 16 education. Our host was Mr Óttar Ólafsson who is the school's study counsellor. He explained a little more about the upper secondary school system whereby students have access to 4 main types of school: vocational (offering courses which develop trade skills and competencies), academic (grammar schools offering academic courses), special schools (offering vocational courses specifically for people with learning, mental and physical disabilities) and comprehensive schools (offering academic, vocational and technical training and courses).

He gave us a tour of the school which has impressive and modern facilities including bright airy classrooms, students' art work displayed on the walls, a media studies and broadcasting suite, workshops for fashion design, fine arts, music and drama, extensive computer facilities, a well equipped library as well as vocational training workshops. These included:

Metal trades – covering all types of fabrication and metal work including MIG and TIG welding, gas cutting and arc welding, plumbing and pipe work, lathe operation and steel works

Car trades – the school has a contract with an insurance company which allows them to take in written off vehicles. There are bays for each stage of the process from examination and assessment of repairs, all aspects of mechanical repair and diagnosis of faults through to body work repairs and spraying as well as retesting vehicles for resale

Vocational training is also available in the fields of social work and training for teaching assistants. The school also offers a preparatory course for those who have not passed the compulsory matriculation exam, which is a one year course giving access, on successful completion, to further academic and vocational courses. It also provides a course for those students with special educational needs. Core subjects of Maths, Icelandic, Danish and English are taught across the curriculum. Courses work on a unit credit system and a certain number of credits are required in order to complete the chosen course or qualification.

Óttar explained that many young people join the labour market at 16 rather than accessing upper secondary education and this has prompted the development of more vocational course options at this level in an attempt to address the drop out problem. This route gives students the opportunity to follow vocational pathways which equip them with trade skills that they can use in the labour market although core subjects are a compulsory part of such pathways. Through discussion with Óttar, it became apparent that there are similar tensions between education and training and the industry sectors as are sometimes evident in the UK. There are limited work experience opportunities for students who have not completed their matriculation exams. Despite a working group being set up to look at this, employers lost interest and were not cooperating with the

schools in developing this element of vocational training. However, in some sectors, for example the aluminium industry, industry training boards and companies have developed their own training programs and employed schools to deliver this. In the public sector also, there has been marked success in collaboration with public services to develop vocational training programs for social workers and teaching assistants.

Óttar then explained about his role at the school and how his time is divided. He is a teacher for 50% of the time where he goes out into the aluminium factories to deliver education and training to employees and the other 50% of his time is taken up with his counselling role. The counselling work that he does involved careers advice, group work, arranging additional support for students including support arrangements for exams, offering personal counselling to students and using his skills to identify students at risk and prevent them from dropping out of education. He liaises with other agencies such as social services who are sometimes involved in individual cases and can assist students financially where this is appropriate to keep them in education, as well as working closely with psychological services, communities, families and teaching staff. He is also supported in this by another counsellor employed by the school who also arranges dyslexia and learning needs assessments and support as well as support for students with physical disabilities. Therefore, the role of the guidance counsellor in the upper secondary school is wide and varied.

Summary

The facilities and environment at the school really were impressive. There was a sense of pride in the environment that had been created and a real commitment to supporting students in whatever way necessary. The following issues seemed pertinent:

- there seem to be similar issues though, in terms of the level of drop out which stands at around 25% for this school, in relation to the difficulties in building effective links with industry, and in the need to work with other agencies to identify and support those at risk of disengaging
- Óttar and his colleague are both directly employed by the school but this does not seem to present a conflict of interest as the school support the guidance counsellors in finding the solution that is best for the young person whilst also trying to keep them engaged in their studies. It is interesting that the counsellors here and in other institutions, are not engaged in guidance full time but usually combine this with varying levels of teaching duties.
- working with other agencies in securing financial and social support for students is also crucial, as in the UK, in order to meet the needs of students with learning or social needs.
- the foundation course offered here seems to work similarly to access courses in the UK only it doesn't have a lower age limit as we do for this route. However, as Iceland does not have a work based learning accreditation system, students who wish to follow vocational routes still have to complete 4 years of vocational studies before they can gain professional certification and access to skilled trade jobs. This is an area which is being developed e.g. the teaching that Óttar does

- out in the aluminium factories, but essentially, vocational students still have to take the 4 core subjects and successfully complete their courses.
- the difficulties experienced in building and maintaining an effective network of cooperation between industry and the schooling system is another area of interest. In the UK we do have the Education Business Partnership and various other forums trying to link industry and education, although from my experience, their role is limited. It does make me wonder that, as we have these structures in place, whether we could be exploiting them more effectively in providing opportunities for students who have not achieved academically and those young people who are disengaged from any sort of work, education or training.

Conclusion

This study visit has been inspirational, informative and has given me a much wider sense of the European dimension in guidance counselling. Whilst it would be foolish to assume that ideas and lessons can be transposed without regard for the social, cultural and demographic differences between societies, this does not mean that there are not lucrative avenues that could be pursued. It has given me an insight into the Icelandic education and guidance systems as well as some of the structures and organizations in place that are trying to address the personal and social needs of young people and the development of accreditation in the vocational field. With a fantastic host in Bjarni, we also learnt a great deal about the history of Iceland and its cultural and economic development, adding a rich dimension to our experience and allowing us to put the information we learned into a historical and social context.

Although the contents of this visit were a change to the original Academia course, it has been a valuable experience and given me a much broader view of systems of support for young people in Iceland. All of our hosts were incredibly friendly, welcoming and professional and they really made the visit something special. It has made me aware and motivated to find out more about the opportunities for developing new ideas and getting involved in exchanging good practice ideas in a European context. Although each country has its own social, cultural, economic and demographic characteristics, I think sometimes in the UK, we can become complacent thinking that we already know the right way to do things but this visit has taught me that this can be short sighted. There are lots of lessons to be learned and ideas that can be exchanged for the benefit of the young people that we work with and it would be great if there were further opportunities to develop this dimension.

All of the visits were worthwhile but what I found particularly useful were the ideas and activities that are taking place in relation to:

Hitt Husið – the emphasis on art and culture in developing young people's sense of identity and self worth, the variety of projects housed under one roof and the various activities operating out of the Trojan Horse office in relation to supporting and providing opportunities and activities for young people at risk or who are disengaged.

Fjölsmiðjan – the central role of links with companies and industry which supply the work that the young people do at the centre and the work experience and job opportunities which arise from this cooperation. The high standard of the environment in which the young people are working and the quality and volume of trade tools that they use helps the young people not only take pride in their work but also in themselves. The tutors commented that the environment, equipment and level of benefits all contribute towards the young people feeling that they are worth something. The standard of work being turned out as a result was really impressive.

Nemacode – we received a really enthusiastic and hospitable welcome here and the invest inventory itself seems to have great potential in supporting the work done with young

people around career choices and the development and identification of skills and preferences. It would be nice to be able to explore this further although a certain number of people would need to be interested in order to justify the two day training being delivered in the UK. However, it appears to have real value in supporting and enriching the work done with young people in schools, colleges, the community and work based learning settings.

Mennt and Fræðslumiðstöð atvinnulífsins – both these organizations are making significant inroads into joined up thinking and cooperation between education, industry, policy makers, trade unions and industry training bodies. The underpinning ethos of lifelong learning is enabling them to develop opportunities for those in the labour market and develop the work based learning opportunities in Iceland. A lot could be learned from their approaches to managing complex and sometimes conflicting organizations in a meaningful and effective partnership aiming towards common goals.

Spiderweb and WATCH – this project was interesting and there is definite potential to apply it directly to the work done by Connexions in school, colleges and the community as well having a use in the context of study support. There is potential for adapting this to use on a one to one basis with harder to help clients and could also be introduced into provision such as E2E. It would be great if there was an opportunity to attend the conference in October and I would like to look into the possibility of further LEONARDO funding to enable this, subject to the agreement of my managers.

Bjarni was an incredible host and I would like to extend a wholehearted thanks to him and Phil and Lee at Careers Europe for making this a really fascinating and fantastic visit. It has inspired me to look into further opportunities in sharing good practice and ideas in a European context as much of what I have learned from this visit will benefit my professional practice and my clients. It has encouraged me to look past the immediate to the wider picture and what lessons can be learned from practices in other countries. I would also like to thank my colleagues Sue and Angela for adding another dimension to my learning regarding the different practices and systems operating in the UK, not to mention my company for letting me take part in this visit. I hope that this is not the end of my European experience!