

**ACADEMIA Exchange for European Guidance  
Counsellors**

**SMOOTH TRANSITION FROM  
COMPREHENSIVE  
EDUCATION TO UPPER  
SECONDARY AND TO  
FURTHER EDUCATION WITH  
GUIDANCE COOPERATION**

**KUOPIO, FINLAND 11 – 15 April 2005**

**Sunday 10 April**

**Tour of Kuopio followed by an informal get-together at the Hotel Savonia to introduce the hosts and programme of the week.**

I am fortunate to have been accepted onto the guidance exchange programme to Kuopio, Finland along with counsellors from France, Spain, Norway, Greece, Ireland and Estonia. The photograph below shows our hosts holding the flowers and participants of the group.



Kuopio is situated in central Finland and with over 90,000 inhabitants and is well known for its successful enterprises, high quality education, research and science. One third of the area of Kuopio is water and a half forests, it provides an area that is rich in nature, despite being a modern developing city and region.

We were taken on a tour of Kuopio city and shown some interesting landmarks before meeting with our hosts, who gave us some background information to the Finnish education system and in particular to Savo Vocational College.

Savo Consortium for Education in Kuopio and Varkas has a new idea to collect expertise together, to get a better response to regional and educational needs. The nature and the people are the resources that are needed for trade and in Savo Vocational College they have: -

- 8,500 students
- 5,600 full time students
- 1,300 apprenticeships
- 1,600 employment courses

- 1,050 staff
- 14 hectare site
- Budget of 77 million euros

There mission statement is: -

- Skills for life

There values are: -

- Respect for humanity
- Commitment
- Competency

Fields of study: -

- Technology, computers, transport
- Social Services, health and sport
- Tourism, catering and domestic service
- Culture
- Natural resources and the environment
- Business and administration

This is the general upper secondary school syllabus and eligibility for further study.

**Monday 11 April**

**Savo Vocational College**

Savo Vocational College provides qualifications for more than 70 occupations and the root is either through school or competence based qualifications. Students may enter the College at 16 through to retirement. 80% of the students at present are from the North Savo region especially for aircraft technology .

The College has cooperation with over 750 companies and organisations with agreements at secondary schools and different projects.

The College is very active taking part in exchanges from abroad for English courses and other projects as below : -

- Student exchange 350 outgoing / 110 in ( 2005 )
- Staff exchange
- Projects with EU funding
- Cooperation with international partners

## Future challenges

- How to make a vocational system that is versatile to cope with the demands of a changing society
- How to improve the cost effective services in response to local and regional circumstances
- Hope to provide pathways for vocational education to higher education

Savo Vocational College was joined onto the Best Western Hotel where I stayed and the employees of the hotel were students from the College. This was amazing I had never seen anything like this in the UK, a hotel that formed part of the College. The students worked in all areas of the hotel from reception to restaurant etc; and they were able to practice and learn things first hand. There was even a coffee shop where students sold the produce they had made in the College such as jam, bread and cakes etc: and after sampling these I can assure you they were excellent quality.

## The Finnish System of Education

<b>Pre school</b>	age 6 (1 yr )	
<b>Comprehensive</b>	age 7 ( 9 yrs )	
<b>Extra 10<sup>th</sup> grade</b>	(voluntary where the student creates his own study plan and work placements ).	
<b>Upper secondary school</b>	choice of 5 subjects Vocational route Drop outs	made by 60% made by 30% 6%

## Career Guidance and Counselling in Finland

All student counsellors have to have a master's degree in addition to counselling training, which is very different to England, where no degree is compulsory. In Finland guidance is usually in groups inside the classroom, although some individual counselling does take place. The basic goals and curriculum guidelines are similar to the UK : -

Basic Goals of Guidance Counselling : -

- Support personal growth

- Promote study skills
- Counsel in education, vocational and professional orientation
- Promote skills for life long learning
- Learn different tools for searching information

**Tuesday 12 April**

### **Ministry of Labour**

On a visit the ministry of labour the offices were found to be light and airy with plenty of information for clients to access. Finland has a problem of people in low skills and their strategy is to reduce unemployment and increase entrepreneurship and self - employment. (figures for unemployment were not available ) . The operating system was similar to the UK, a front desk where appointments could be made and several offices for interviews. The benefits that clients received was calculated by their past earnings, which was but is no longer operational in the UK, and through some Union contribution.

There were special programmes for the unemployed, or low skilled as well as the right for all immigrants to go through a programme of training in the first three years of them entering the country. Three workers specialised in working with disabled out of the 68 permanent employees and in addition to these permanent staff, there were 20 temporary employees. Thirty of the permanent staff was guidance advisers and they worked with young people of 17 – 24 years searching information on work and training. In addition to working with older clients. The employment office liased with possible employers for job opportunities and also went through vacancies to find suitable people.

The guidance workers can make doctors appointments for the clients , which is not possible in the UK, where this needs to be personally made. The waiting time for a report is two months to a year.

There was an invaluable library of books, brochures and videos on jobs and industry, which were all available for use or loan and open access to the Internet available to the public. The information service also offered personal guidance without appointments, easily accessed via the Internet or by telephone. In comparison to the Uk where appointments are not known to be made via the Internet and most consultations require appointments it was interesting to learn about this method and how it was working. Another interesting system in place was “ Education Information Groups”, where classes were held so that clients could go and look at services available. This service had been accessed mostly by the immigrant population but on the whole had proved popular to all.

Finland has a high rate of its immigrants that are unemployed. In the future Finland will need an increased labour force, so a solution may lie through immigrants bridging this gap, by taking up certain employment, or through training designed to meet these future needs.

In the Kuopio office there were two permanent advisers and one temporary out of 130 full times and 143 part times, for the whole of Finland, as at 2004, offering a wide range of services to the employed and unemployed. Interestingly there appeared to be no personal information recorded about the client, only the number of service transactions and samples, which were collected for, records only. There was no system of telephoning clients to track what they had done, or intended to do by the employment office. They were very interested in my local office procedure, as were the participants from other countries, who did not have such a tracking system in operation.

In 2004 the employment office had 355,000 client contacts, which over 52,000 had been seen in groups.

Information on jobs was available on an educational web site, with links to training and addresses where the training took place. The client easily accessed the lists and the information.

### **Vocational Guidance in the Ministry of Employment Office - Kuopio**

The office employed 7 psychologists who each had their own clients who came from: -

- Employment office
- Schools
- Health service
- Social services
- Self referral

These clients may have a long unemployment history or have problems with alcohol or drug abuse or maybe issues with crime and the office liaises with other agencies to find the best solution. The difference to the UK was the guidance counsellors were situated at the employment office and they had to be qualified in psychology. These qualifications are not specified in the UK as a necessity. Vocational guidance aims to find realistic plans and solutions and aid people to find suitable opportunities within the labour market.

### **Optional evening programme a visit to Savonia Polytechnic**

Most students apply direct online to the Polytechnic = 90 %. Selection is either by student grades and exam or exam only. The studies are the same level as at University so the same level of English and Swedish is required. Students have to graduate in a specified time where as at University there's no time limit. The graduation includes a work placement of six months and a thesis.

All the staff does some counselling and there are no full time counsellors that are independent of teaching, at present they are developing the service further. They take an holistic approach and with no full time counsellors all staff do some counselling work. Most of the staff is qualified in counselling but also as teachers. One of the problems is that more counsellors are needed, as the teachers do not have the time to do this role as well as their own.

Students make their own study plans and counsellors do not chase them if they have problems, they have to contact the counsellors personally and ask to be seen. They have regular group meetings where the students discuss the programmes and their progress etc:

### **Wednesday 13 April**

#### **Kallaves Upper Secondary School**

Kallaves have 20 – 30 group advisers who are also teachers and they give help and guidance to the student in issues relating to their course work. They are similar in their equivalent status to UK year heads. There are no set classes in any upper school in Finland and the student makes his own timetable and conducts their studies in a more personal way. This method has a 60 % success rate and many students choose this option when aiming to go to Polytechnic or University.

Guidance counsellors meet with the student on average 30 times in three years and these meetings may involve taking the student to fairs or work places. Most of the guidance offered to students takes place in small groups and involve career planning or compiling CV's and interview techniques.

There appeared to be a lot of cooperation taking place between staff and schools and the communication between them was excellent.

#### **Dual Diploma**

The dual diploma was very popular with students and they could attend any Polytechnic, or College even if they were not available in their town. Part of the study was at Upper School and part Vocational School, for example students may be interested in reception work, or catering. The students found this method of study a lot easier. If the course was not available in the students home town they could apply to other areas to study.

Every student had his own password to the computer and went on to check timetables, their marks etc; and homework could be done on the computer, which had the advantage of putting them in touch with others, students or teachers. Computer technology was a large part of the school system used for all the time by students, who were able to access the Internet at any time and without restrictions. The trust between the students and staff was remarkable and unknown to me in the UK, well not Internet wise anyway. Another difference I found difficult was lunch, which was at 10.30, am and is apparently early in all educational establishments. Eating lunch when I'd just had breakfast was surreal for me but I learnt this was also the case in Norway and some of the other countries participating.

#### **Advance Mathematics**

We were fortunate to see the advanced maths class and it was unbelievable. The web site page gave information to the class, who could then ask questions to teachers and

students anywhere in the world. Students could help each other, access help from teachers and practice for exams. The smart board was projected 360 degrees onto the wall behind the students and you could write and save onto the board. The guidance counsellor had her own web page that she used to communicate with the students, giving information, help and advice. 55% of students took basic mathematics and 40% advanced mathematic examinations.

The students were impressive, well behaved and they spoke excellent English coming over as being very mature for their age. Although students addressed the teachers by their Christian names, this had not affected the respect that was shown to them.

### **Savo Vocational College Toivala: Natural Resources and Environment Unit**

The afternoon session was arranged out in the forest, where the students had prepared a mini assault course for us to climb over, with some tasks to complete. It was good fun getting into teams to compete, slipping about on the ice and the snow it was wonderful to be out in the forest. Below in the photograph, I am seen attempting the assault course, by walking across a plank of wood.



The students cooked salmon for us smoked in the traditional way pinned to a wooden board, which we ate outside, sitting on tree trunks using wooden utensils and plates. The students were able to train in forestry and agriculture and they also learnt how to survive outside in zero temperatures, building shelter from basic materials that were available in the forest. The afternoon was very well organised and the students took excellent care of us making us very welcome. They even made us badges with our names on carved out of wood.

The photograph shows us taking a rest after completing the assault course.



After the session we walked through the forest, which was covered in snow to a large natural smoke sauna where a sauna and ice dipping was available for those wishing to participate. The sight of those who participated jumping into icy water through the frozen lake was enough for me. I'm afraid this is one activity I did not take up, but later I wish I had for the experience and opportunity.

#### **Thursday 14 April**

#### **Raimo Vuorien – Researcher from Institute of Educational Guidance “University of Jyväskylä”**

We were given a discussion on preliminary guidance and exchanging lifelong guidance using Common European reference tools for guidance from Raimo Vuorien of Jyväskylä University and I have listed the discussion topics below: -

- Themes
- Which EU policy goals does career guidance serve?
- Key policy drivers
- Current action at European level
- The European Commission Review of Career Guidance 2001 - 2004
- Key issues and challenges in the reviews
- Definition of lifelong experience
- Resolution on Guidance for the council of Ministers of Education

- Handbook on guidance Policy Development for policy makers
- The handbook divided into four sections
- Importance of Guidance confirmed in Maastricht Communiqué
- Common European reference tools for lifelong guidance
- Common aims and principals of lifelong guidance provision
- Some common reference points for quality assurance systems for guidance provision in Europe (meta- criteria)

It was an interesting discussion. Then we formed into groups, each preparing a presentation about the related topics and how they related to each of our countries. After this each group presented their findings to the class and the issues were discussed. The following websites may prove useful in related topics: -

<http://communities.trainingvillage.gr//lifelongguidance>

<http://www.trainingvillage.gr/etv/PtprojectsNetworks/Guidance>

(<http://europea.eu.int/comm./dgs/education-culture/publ/edu-form-en.html#Guidance>)

## **Friday 15 April**

### **Savo Vocational College Youth Workshops**

There were eight workshops to visit: -

1. Theatre
2. Media
3. Cookery
4. Metalwork
5. Woodworking
6. Textiles
7. Automobile mechanics
8. Art

The workshops had 45 places lasting from one month to one year for aged 17-25 year olds. If a young person was unsure of what they wanted to do, they could go to the workshop to plan their future and they were still able to claim unemployment benefit. These workshop placements were integrated with the unemployed office and students claimed 22 euros per day. They had a booklet, which they filled in called “My Way” and this mapped out what they wanted to do in the future and how they planned to do this.

The young people made products in the workshops, which they later sold at summer fetes; this process was seen as important because they took more interest over their work knowing it was for future sale. The products they had made were of a high standard and examples were puppets, placemats, cards, cupboards and metal stands

for display purposes. After completing the workshops the students receive a certificate for their portfolio.

If the student is ill or cannot attend the workshop they have to phone to state this and after 5 days absence they need a doctors letter or they will lose their benefit.

The College youth service were very good at finding employment for the young people and had a good networking system in operation as well as good liaison with the Ministry of Employment.

They had 60 young people on projects during our visit, with an average of 5-7 in each workshop doing 6.5 hours a day, 5 days a week. The project was funded through Kuopio city and Ministry of Education.

### **Evaluation of Academia visit**

During the afternoon we got together to discuss and analyse the academia visit. Overall I found the visit to be very beneficial, especially sharing procedures between countries.

The topics we discussed were interesting and the places we visited impressive. A lot of effort had gone into organising the visit, which was done in an efficient and professional way. Our hosts met us with enthusiasm and kindness and nothing was too much trouble for them; they were very professional in everything they did.

There was some similarities the English and Finnish system of education but overall the Finnish system was more advanced than ours and higher education at University or Polytechnics was free. Provisions were laid down by the 1919 Constitution on compulsory free of charge education, for all academic institutions provided by the public authorities. In addition to free hot school meals, free school healthcare, and free basic education materials, free transport is provided for students who live too far away to walk or use public transport for travel to the establishment.

There was impressive networking in place and cooperation between organisations was first class. This impressive system of cooperation was apparent from all perspectives but especially from teachers, students and guidance counsellors, who all worked together to provide an excellent service.

On visits to establishments and by eating lunch at the school and college canteens it was amazing to see all healthy food and the students enjoying salads and fruit. There was no junk food and all the meals are free, which I feel is an excellent way to remove the stigmatisation between the rich and the poor. England may do well to adapt this healthy eating, as well as its system of free school meals. In this country students have to present a means tested pass, enabling them to free meals but this is used in view of friends, teachers, catering staff and is embarrassing for the young person. Many young people jeopardise their diets and health by refusing to use a pass in front of friends and simply do not eat lunch at all.

In Finland there is a great intent to giving out information to people but the person remained the most important and not the information. Pupils in the schools were well behaved quiet and very proud of their establishments, systems and their teachers, who in turn were proud of them. Although students addressed staff by Christian names this did not impair their respect for them. Special needs pupils were integrated well within the system, and not stigmatised at all.

Everyone on the exchange worked well together and I have taken away a lot of knowledge from the visit. I would like to thank the “ **Leonardo Project**” and “**Careers Europe**” for giving me the opportunity to take part in this exchange.

Annie Zakharov