

Report on Guidance Exchange Visit to Oslo, 9 - 13 May 2005.

Background

The theme of the exchange visit was: Recognition of Foreign Education and Validation of Non-formal and informal Learning in Norway. Most of the visit was based around Oslo itself, except on Thursday when the group visited the region of Hadeland, approximately one hours drive from Oslo.

The group consisted of:

2 Connexions Advisers from the UK

2 Teachers from Italy

2 Teachers from Spain

2 Teachers from Greece

1 Counsellor from France

4 Representatives from the Czech Republic who worked in a variety of settings with young people, adults and employers

2 counsellors from Estonia who worked with young people and unemployed clients of different ages.

The exchange was very well organised and structured around the main theme. Some changes were made to the programme on the third day to accommodate the interests of the group.

Monday 9 May

The first day was spent in the offices of the Directorate of Labour (AETAT), where presentations covered the role of the Directorate, Norwegian labour market trends, and the Norwegian education and guidance system.

AETAT's Main Roles:

- Provides services and information to the Ministry of Labour
- To create a well-functioning and inclusive labour market, focusing on helping people with disabilities and long-term illness
- To encourage the growth of employment and vocational training
- Increase contact with employers and assist them with recruitment
- To support active job search of job seekers
- Close follow up of unemployed after 3 months of unemployment
- Funding of labour market measures/programmes targeted at the unemployed
- Administration of unemployment and disability benefits
- Increase the use of self-service for job seekers and employers through use of the internet
- Provide up-to-date information on the labour market

Euroguidance Norway

Euroguidance Norway is part of the Labour Market Services within AETAT, and has the following remit:

- To strengthen career guidance systems within Norway by targeting guidance counsellors within educational institutions and AETAT

- To liaise with AETAT, the EEC and the education system within Norway
- To disseminate European examples of good practice in careers guidance.

The Norwegian Labour Market

Norway has a small population of approximately 4 million people and a low unemployment rate of 4%. After a recession at the end of the 1980s, when unemployment rose to 7%, the economy has been growing but the labour market situation has not been improving:

- There has been an increase in unemployment in Nursing/Health/Public Service
- The highest levels of unemployment are among people without degree level qualifications (5%), whereas graduate unemployment is only 1%.
- Although there has been a decrease in unemployment in Manufacturing and Construction, in reality the employment levels are staying the same in these sectors
- 3 times the number of individuals are registered unemployed in a year than the actual unemployment rate, i.e. there is a high turnover of people moving in and out of the labour market
- The participation level in the labour market is high at 79%

Challenges facing the Norwegian economy:

- An increasingly ageing population
- A growing number of disabled pensioners, although it is now becoming increasingly difficult to qualify for disability pension
- There is a low participation among the immigrant population, and consequently a high level of unemployment.

Lifelong Guidance: an EU perspective

EU Policy since 1992 rests on the following principles:

- A common identity
- The free flow of currency, people and goods within the EU
- To create the most competitive economy
- Human Capital must be knowledge based which requires access to Lifelong Learning to keep updating skills and knowledge

Since 2000 many EU documents and reports have mentioned the importance of lifelong Learning and the important role of careers guidance. Lifelong Learning can contribute to EU policy goals in the following ways:

- Increase individual's employability
- Create an efficient investment in education and training as drop out rates should decrease
- Labour Market efficiency: quicker job search and therefore shorter periods of unemployment
- Would aid Social Inclusion
- Social Equity would result
- Economic Development would increase

The group then considered the EU's Principles of Guidance Provision, and discussed how well they were met in their own country.

In conclusion the group felt the Principles represented the ideal level of provision, but in most countries this was not currently available. Common problems were:

- Careers Guidance not generally being available outside the education system. This meant adults and potential job changers found it difficult or impossible to access guidance.
- Government Departments of Labour were seen to be 'processing' the unemployed out of benefits and back into any kind of employment. The needs of the individual were not their main concern. In addition, government cutbacks meant reduction of staff and contracting out of Ministry of Labour's services to private companies.
- Where guidance was available within education, there was limited time for counsellors/advisers to deal with the number of students in institutions.
- In most countries guidance and opportunities for training was focussed on the unemployed so universal access was not available.

However, the increasing emphasis being placed on careers guidance and Lifelong Learning within the EU will hopefully result in a higher profile and interest in careers guidance across Europe.

The Norwegian Education and Guidance System

In Norway there are 2 levels of secondary school:

Lower Secondary: age 13-15

Upper Secondary: age 15-18

Upper Secondary schools offer academic and vocational courses, but different courses are available at different schools. Pupils would apply for University or University colleges (which offer professional courses such as teaching, psychology) after an academic course. Pupils following a vocational course would study for 2 years and then could apply for a 2-year work practice to become qualified in their chosen vocational area. Employers can claim wage subsidies if they recruit a student. Access to University courses was still possible if they performed well in their vocational course. The government have set a recommended target of 50% of young people should opt for vocational courses.

Access to Careers Counselling

Teachers act as careers counsellors within schools. They must be qualified teachers and have 2 years teaching experience. Students are 'entitled' to counselling, but counsellors are allocated approximately 1 hour per 25 students across the school year. Pupils might see a careers counsellor at Lower Secondary School when considering their 1-week work experience, and when deciding which Upper Secondary school to apply for. At Upper Secondary School the counsellor would help Vocational students to get a placement in employment, and help academic students decide on their choice of University course.

Universities have separate Careers counsellors.

If students drop out of the Education system at any point, they would see a counsellor within the local employment office who would help them look for work. Government courses/training programmes would also be available to them. The availability of specialised careers counselling outside of education was seen to be minimal and focussed on moving people into employment rather than developing their career.

* Later on in the week, we visited an Upper Secondary School and found out about 2 recent developments in careers guidance:

- School counsellors were being divided into career specialists and general counsellors as it was becoming increasingly difficult for teachers to cover both areas
- Local Councils were starting to set up 'Careers Centres' to deal with dropouts from education courses.

Tuesday 10 May 2005

Tuesday was spent at the VOX offices, the Norwegian Institute for Adult Validation of non-formal and informal competence.

In 1999 Norway established a national system for validation of non-formal and informal learning which would have legitimacy in both the workplace and the education sector.

The Realkompetanse Project was intended to increase the percentage of the population with recognised qualifications, particularly among older citizens, in a push towards creating a knowledge economy. Norway, like most of Europe, realised it could not compete with the third world as a manufacturing centre and that employees in this sector would have to become qualified for other kinds of work.

2 other pieces of legislation were also aimed at promoting education for adults:

University and College Act (2001): Adults over 25 could seek admission to courses at University or College on the basis of their non-formal and informal learning. Exemption from certain elements of courses would be possible based on documented evidence of non-formal and informal learning.

A pilot project within Higher Education institutions discovered there were few procedures or guidelines available for dealing with exemption applications in the beginning. In addition, the existing tools used for documenting non-formal and informal learning were not adapted for use in Higher Education.

Education Act (2002): Adults born before 1978 have a statutory right to be accepted for upper secondary education on the basis of assessed non-formal and informal learning. Education must be adapted to the individual's 'need and life situation'.

VOX were disappointed with the number of adults taking up this offer so far:

2003: 21 181 adults with statutory rights to secondary education; in 2003 10 549 adults had been accepted for secondary education on the basis of their assessed non-formal/informal learning (80% in vocational education).

Methods of Assessment and Documentation

No singular method of assessment was enforced and pilot projects were encouraged to consider different approaches. However, the following factors should be apparent to ensure that documentation and validation processes are similar and can be validated:

- Information

- Guidance
- CV
- Identification of skills
- Assessment
- Documentation

Responsibilities in different sectors:

- Workplace: employees responsible for identifying their skills; employers responsible for assessing and confirming these skills.
- Upper secondary education: schools are responsible for assessing and documenting individuals' skills. The 19 county councils in Norway have a mandate to offer adults individually adapted training at upper secondary school.
- Higher Education: individual institutions are responsible
- Third (Voluntary) sector: individual adults have the responsibility in the form of self-declaration forms.

Benefits of Documentation

For the individual: increased self-awareness, formal documentation of their knowledge and skills, tailored training for individuals.

For the company: provides a better overview of the company's human resources and helps in developing a development strategy.

The initial Realkompetanse Project ran from 1999 to 2002 and involved 50 separate projects:

“Principles and procedures have been created for a national system for the documentation and validation of non-formal learning. The education system has opened its doors to the validation of non-formal learning. There is still some work to be done in the workplace, in the third sector, in the education system and across arenas to implement a national system” (The Realkompetanse Project, 1999-2002, VOX).

Comments

VOX is part of the Ministry of Education in Norway and AETAT staff were keen to work more closely with the Ministry to develop the competence model. It was encouraging to hear that the Norwegian Government had given individuals the statutory right to education and training, and to recognition of their informal learning. There also appeared to be a lot of initiatives being developed to help assess and accredit adults' skills and experiences.

Wednesday 11 May

The morning was spent visiting an Adult Education centre in Akershus County where adults can have their non-formal/informal learning assessed and validated.

Just over 1 million people currently live in the two counties of Oslo and Akershus and both counties experienced great population growth in the 1990s. Part of this growth included a large number of non-Western immigrants – the immigrant population is approximately 30 000.

This centre was one of 4 service centres within Akershus county catering for adults. The centre was located within an Upper Secondary school campus, and integrated (when possible and appropriate) within the school system.

The Service Centre provided:

- Information
- Guidance
- Handling of Applications
- Charting of skills
- Administering the assessment procedure

The main features of the centre were summarised as follows:

FLEXIBLE, ADAPTED EDUCATION

- Study Centres
- Education at the workplace (e.g. in Health care settings)
- Plenary lectures
- Internet-based education
- Classroom teaching
- Continuous start

INDIVIDUALLY ARRANGED EDUCATION

Where possible, courses were tailor-made for individuals so this generally did not mean full-time attendance at the school. Adult students could miss out parts of a course if they had been assessed as competent in that area, and only attend the parts of the course they had not covered.

As the Upper Secondary School offered Health and Social Care courses, many adults were improving their qualifications in this field to give them access to Higher Education. The majority of these students were women.

The Centre's Advisers have found that the school's teachers are keen to have adult students, and there seem to have been few problems in fitting them into 'school classes.' However, if more than 8 adult students wanted to do a course, a separate class was arranged. There was also an attempt to minimise the amount of time spent in the classroom and to use the more informal study centre.

This centre also worked with the centre based in Oslo which meant classes could be combined and a wider range of subjects could be offered. Advisers admitted it might be difficult to be as flexible in more rural areas of Norway where the population is smaller and more dispersed.

Case Study

The adviser told how a Russian immigrant had approached the centre to be assessed for a hairdressing qualification. She had her own salon in Norway but could not enter competitions as she was unqualified. The centre arranged for a hairdressing tutor to 'shadow' her, and at the end of the first day she was passed as a competent hairdresser.

Afternoon Session

In the afternoon AETAT had arranged a choice of workshop sessions to accommodate the various interests of the group. I attended the session which looked at a 'competency tool' developed by the National Association for Adult Education (NAAE) and the Norwegian Youth Council (LNU) for adults involved in their organisations. The NAAE offer courses for adults in a wide range of topics mainly in

the leisure field. The LNU is an umbrella organisation for around 70 Norwegian non-governmental organisations for children and young people.

The NAAE and the LNU have been working to develop a system to help document the competencies of people taking part in the activities their member organisations offer. The system needed to accommodate:

- A variety of competencies
- Be adaptable to a variety of settings
- To be used in different ways

The tool, or document, was intended to assist people in identifying their own competencies, either orally or in writing. Individuals were advised to use it with other people: friends, a study circle etc.

The tool/system consisted of:

- Introduction
- Explanations
- Instruction and Guidance
- Forms to use when making your own documentation
- Examples
- Dictionary of voluntary opportunities

When to use the tool/system:

- To get an overview of experience and competencies
- To prepare for a job interview or use as an extended CV
- To map the competencies of the employees in a firm/organisation to help with the allocation of new tasks
- To help raise individual's self-esteem

User experiences

About 50 people in different organisations, labour market authorities and employers have used or evaluated the system, and in general the feedback has been positive. Most users think that the system has been useful and that it helped them in describing their competencies. However, many of them found it was very big and involved a lot of reading. In addition, people found the part that involved specifically describing your competencies difficult to complete.

Comments

The tool was available in an electronic and paper version, and was indeed a lengthy document. It resembled a cross between a Record of Achievement and a very detailed CV. I would think that individuals would have found it difficult to work through on their own, especially if they had poor literacy skills. We thought it could be useful to use with low ability or long-term unemployed clients or groups as a form of self-assessment aimed at raising individual's self-esteem and confidence. However, this would have to be done over a period of time rather than all at once.

Thursday 12 May

We visited Lunner Products, a sheltered workshop at Hadeland, an hour's drive from Oslo.

Lunner Products was established in 1992 by Lunner Council, Hadeland. Its aim was to employ people on invalidity pensions and social benefits and to provide a variety of jobs for these employees in a positive working environment.

The company could offer the following workshops:

- Packing: the largest department. Competed commercially for contracts which larger companies would consider too small to be worthwhile. This could be putting together folders of training programmes, promotional packages for mail shots, etc.
- Laundry
- Recycling shop which was open to the local community.
- Data processing
- Office Rental

Lunner receive funding from the national government and from the local council which together meets half the company's costs. The other half is generated through production. They currently have 25 people funded through the Ministry of Labour's special measures.

Validation of non-formal and informal competence at Lunner Products.

The company have been involved in a pilot project funded by VOX to survey the competencies among the 27 able-bodied employees, and to plan a development strategy. The project has been operating for nearly a year and will soon end.

The process has involved:

- Recording of tasks in a handbook
- Six monthly reviews with employees discussing current competencies and plans for future
- Developing a competency handbook
- Issuing a competency certificate
- Compiling a CV
- Registering the competencies

The company felt the project had been a positive experience and has allowed them to examine their skills/abilities and recognise them. It was felt to be initially challenging to have to write about yourself, register everything and explain it to others. The manager also said it had produced emotional reactions among some employees and it felt like you were replaying your life!

Work experience partnerships with upper secondary schools.

This programme started in Autumn 2003 and was seen as an opportunity to further develop Lunner's network of contacts. It comprised of:

- Well-prepared visits

- Link courses for students
- Teacher placements
- Lectures, enterprise visits.

Although any school pupils can take up a work experience place at Lunner, the offer is more suitable for those who:

- Need experience of practical work outside a classroom setting
- Are unhappy at school
- Lack concentration at school
- Have difficulties with theoretical subjects

The pupils are expected to:

- Keep good attendance and have a good standard of behaviour
- Be polite towards colleagues and customers
- Be tidy and take care of work equipment
- Have a positive outlook and show initiative.

The work experience handbook outlines the pupil's and the company's responsibilities, and also lists the practical tasks pupils will complete. Although only small numbers of pupils are involved, the programme seems to be working well.

Comments

Lunner Products had a team of dedicated and caring staff who were working hard to make the company successful. Staff said it was encouraging to see all the employees work together if a large order needed to be completed in time for a specific deadline. The 'disabled' employees took a real pride in earning a living doing 'real jobs' in a supportive atmosphere.

Afternoon Visit

A guided tour was arranged around the Hadeland Glassworks. This company had been making glassware for around 200 years and was the last remaining glassworks in the area.

Interesting facts:

- There were currently only male glassblowers working in the company. The guide explained how until only a few years ago girls were prevented from applying for apprenticeships due to the lead present in the resin.
- There were currently 4 apprenticeships available for school leavers and only 2 had been filled. The training was held at a local Upper Secondary School.
- As there was a shortage of skilled glassblowers, the glassworks had recently taken on skilled staff from the Czech Republic and the United Kingdom.

Friday 13 May

On the last morning we attended a presentation by NOKUT, the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education. NOKUT was established in 2003 and its main roles were:

- The accreditation of Higher Education programmes and institutions
- The evaluation of systems at Higher Education Institutions

- The evaluation of courses and programmes in tertiary education
- The recognition of foreign qualifications.

The session mainly covered an overview of Norway's Higher Education system, NOKUT's role in recognising foreign education, the Diploma Supplement and a pilot project on recognising refugees' qualifications.

Norwegian Higher Education System

Between 2001 and 2003 Norway instituted a quality reform of their HE system in line with the Bologna process. 4 types of HEI now existed:

- 5 Universities
- 6 Specialised Universities (Music, Veterinary Science, Theology – 'professional' areas)
- 26 University Colleges – more vocationally-based
- 30 Private Institutions of HE – which can now apply for state recognition and funding.

Admissions requirements for HEIs are successful completion of upper secondary education, or other qualifications recognised as being of equivalent standing. Some courses also have additional entrance requirements.

The degree system is similar to the UK system:

College's Candidate: awarded after 2 years study, can be integrated into a Bachelor's degree. Offered at state university colleges and a few private institutions. (=HND)

Bachelor's degree: requires 3 years study. Awarded by all types of university.

Master's degree: awarded after further 2 years study and includes an independent research work. Offered by selected universities.

Doctoral Degree: awarded after 3 years study beyond Masters. Includes research programme.

Recognition of Foreign Education

NOKUT would compare foreign qualifications to the Norwegian qualification, in conjunction with HEIs. Authorisation to enter a profession would be decided by different professional bodies and might be subject to different laws. NOKUT can refer onto the correct professional body.

NOKUT can give general recognition of the level of degree, mainly to help applicants get employment. The HEI would recognise the subject content of the degree, usually to allow applicants to progress onto further study.

General recognition would be based on:

- Comparing the system and structure of both systems
- HEI must be recognised in their own country
- The programme must be part of HE in their own country
- Principle of time parity: 1 year =1 year
- Equivalent does not mean identical

A document of recognition would then be issued to the applicant.

Challenges:

- To make employers aware that they can use the service
- Recognition is only one of the obstacles to overcome before finding work
- It is difficult for applicants to find out where they can gain recognition

- Transnational changes in education: who is responsible for what?

NOKUT: make formal, legal decisions independent of the Ministry of Education.

Diploma Supplement

The Diploma Supplement was introduced in 1996 to aid the mobility of under and post-graduates in Europe. The purpose of the supplement is:

“ To provide sufficient independent data to improve the international transparency and the fair academic and professional recognition of qualifications” (Diploma Supplement of the University of Oslo).

The intention was that all European countries should use a standard document/template which would allow the recognition of qualifications across national borders, and ensure the mobility of graduates in Europe. However, so far only a handful of countries have introduced the Diploma Supplement.

Since 2002 Norwegian HE institutions have issued this free to all students completing their education. It has been easy to do this in Norway since all HEIs use one of two electronic registration systems, so it was straightforward to incorporate the Diploma into these systems.

The Supplement has 8 parts:

1. Information on the candidate
2. Information on the qualification: type of course, name of University, etc
3. Information on the level of qualification and length of course
4. Information on contents (number of credits, major/minor subjects) and results gained
5. Professional status of the qualification
6. Additional details: contact details for the University and NOKUT
7. Certification of the supplement and date
8. Description of the country’s HE system.

Pilot Project on Recognition of Refugees’ Qualifications 2003-2004

This project was aimed at groups that NOKUT have difficulty in verifying their qualifications:

- Afghan, Somalian and Iraq students where cases of fraud have been detected
- Students with political backgrounds which would make it difficult for NOKUT to contact their home countries

The hypothesis of the project was if there were less emphasis placed on official documents there would be less scope for fraud.

The project involved 22 students with an engineering background. The students were selected either through one of two universities, or if NOKUT had applications from refugees. The criteria for selection was:

- They held residence permits as refugees
- They had claimed HE experience that could not be recognised
- Do not have acceptable qualifications that can be recognised
- Willing to take part in this time consuming project

Method of Assessment

- Students explained their HE experience and completed detailed forms. NOKUT provided help through interviews, and local principalities helped the

students who were involved in Introductory programmes for refugees. The information was sent to the University College.

- An interview was held at the university with a subject specialist. This was an informal interview – no tests were involved.
- A practical test could be arranged if appropriate – in fact, this was hardly used.

Results

- A portfolio was produced of their work and assessments
- Candidates received full or partial recognition of their experience
- Advice on further study was provided.

Problems Identified by the Project

- The time gap between the candidates' experience and the assessment: some had forgotten information, had others understood it? Changes in the field (e.g. technology), some had work experience.
- The language barrier: candidates needed a certain level of English or Norwegian to cope with the assessment. It was difficult to tell if candidates had a poor command of the language or of the engineering technology.
- Some had studied under poor conditions in their home country and this had an effect on their assessment.

The Project's Outcomes

4 were recognised at Bachelor level or better

12 received between 60 and 120 credits (= 1 or 2 years study)

4 did not receive any credits but were given advice on how to get into HE.

After the Project

NOKUT advised universities to use this assessment method when dealing with applications from refugees. Some universities have started to use this method, but have not been able to advertise it widely due to marketing costs. NOKUT plan to arrange some training for institutions, and would like the system to spread over subject areas. This will become an alternative method of assessment for those without formal documentation.

Afternoon Session

This was spent discussing the exchange programme and thanking our hosts for their hard work and hospitality during our stay.

Observations on Common Themes/Trends in Guidance within Europe

- There appears to be an increase in the numbers of well-qualified young people with academic qualifications (Level 4), but a subsequent decrease in young people with vocational skills (Level 3)
- The emphasis on the ‘knowledge economy’ which focuses on upskilling those with poor qualifications
- There is a common split between the services for young people and for adults: Education Department v. Ministry of Labour/Jobcentre. This tends to mean lack of careers guidance for adults (Norway, Greece, Spain and UK), The Jobcentre equivalents are often under-used by adults and seen as unhelpful – only interested in filling vacancies and not providing guidance
- The role of the private sector: Norway’s Ministry of Labour contracts with private agencies to provide programmes and special measures (similar to the UK)
- Parental choice and the individual’s ability to pay for educational and careers guidance has resulted in an unequal market in education and careers guidance
- There is a common targeting of resources at certain groups: the unemployed, the disaffected, people on health benefits.
- Concern over drop out rates particularly among young people. In Norway this has led to a split in schools between career counsellors and personal counsellors so that the former can concentrate on purely career issues. Norway is also starting to establish Careers Centres in County Councils areas: a directly opposite development to what has happened in the UK.

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