

Report on Academia Placement in Dublin 7/3/05 – 11/3/05

Introduction

From 7/3/05 to 11/3/05 I was fortunate enough to spend a week as a guest of the National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE) in Dublin, Ireland. NCGE arranged the details of the placement for me; the travel and finance was organised by the Careers Europe organisation, based in Bradford, UK. The placement was part of the Leonardo Da Vinci Exchange Programme of the European Commission.

Jane Beatty of the NCGE had put together a varied and interesting programme for the group which consisted of myself and a lady from London from the UK; a lady and gentleman from Spain; a lady and gentleman from Norway; two ladies from Estonia; two ladies from France; a lady from Greece; and a lady from Sweden.

Day One: National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE)

The group convened at the NCGE headquarters where, after introductions, Jane Beatty from NCGE gave us an introduction to the Irish Educational System.

Compulsory education in Ireland is from the ages of 6 to 16, though many children attend school from the age of 4. Children leave primary school and start secondary school at the age of 12. The period between the ages of 12/13 to 17/18 is classed as second level education.

There are several types of second level education schools:

- Secondary schools that are privately owned
- Vocational schools managed by the Vocational Education Committee
- Community and Comprehensive Schools managed by Boards of Management

The structure is as follows: the junior cycle lasts for 3 years and culminates in students taking their Junior Certificate Examination. This can be followed by an optional Transition Year (TY) or students can go straight into the Senior Cycle of 2 years which culminates in students taking the Leaving Certificate.

There are 3 types of Leaving Certificate available:

- The established (academic) one
- The vocational programme which can be taken alongside the established certificate
- The applied vocational orientation certificate – this cannot be used to claim University entry, but can be used to gain entry to technical colleges.

Higher Education

In Ireland the state funded Higher Education (HE) sector has:

- Universities (7)
- Technological Colleges (14)
- Colleges of Education (7) – similar to the Further Education sector in the UK. These colleges offer post Leaving Certificate courses; Second Chance education for adults; Adult Literacy and Basic Education programmes; Adult Education – self financed and evening classes; and training in the trade professions.

Everyone resident in Ireland is entitled to one free University or Technological College place.

There are also universities funded by student fees. One such example is the American University in Dublin.

Linda Darby: Guidance in Ireland

Guidance in Ireland is funded via the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. NCGE comes under the Education and Science strand. It was established in 1995 to support guidance in all education settings e.g. by developing materials such as the Guidance Counsellors' Handbook.

Guidance in Ireland takes place at all levels of the Education system and NCGE supports guidance professionals in each area:

- Primary – Support teachers work in 48 schools throughout Ireland with students with emotional and/or behavioural difficulties
- Post Primary – Guidance Counsellors in Second Level schools
- Third Level – Careers Advisers in Third Level
- Non Formal – Guidance Practitioners working in Youthreach and other programmes
- Adult- Guidance Practitioners working with adults in education

Guidance Counsellors in Ireland are usually qualified teachers with an additional guidance qualification. Careers Advisers often have a degree and some experience of work, but are then trained on the job.

Guidance at the Second Level focuses on Personal and Social Development, Careers and Education. Activities include counselling, assessment, information, advice, personal and social development programmes, education development programmes, careers education programmes (these last three delivered as classroom activities), referral, placement and consultation.

The provision of guidance in each school is determined by the number of students in a school. Twenty two hours of guidance equals one full time equivalent counsellor. A school would have to have between 500 and 799 students to qualify for 1 guidance counsellor. Disadvantaged schools would receive more resources.

In Third Level Education Careers Advisers provide careers advice and guidance and counsellors provide counselling. The ratio is usually 1 careers adviser to 2,000 students so a lot of careers work is delivered via lectures and other classroom activities. Universities are increasingly delivering interview and job hunting skills training via websites.

Training in Guidance

Initial training: There is a one year postgraduate qualification in guidance and counselling. Work shadowing is part of the course and one day a week must be spent in school. To work as guidance counselling you must have this qualification and a teaching qualification, though this is the subject of much debate in Ireland. Guidance Counsellors are teachers with teachers' terms and conditions so they are often unavailable when young people need them e.g. in the summer holidays. It has been suggested that the teaching certificate should be abolished as a prerequisite and that counsellors should be employed 09.00 – 17.00 Monday to Friday.

Adult Guidance Initiative

This started in 2000. There are 25 local pilots in the National Adult Guidance and Counselling Service. Each pilot employs 3 staff - a Coordinator/Guidance Counsellor, a Guidance Counsellor and an Information Officer. NCGE coordinate and support the training and evaluation of the Adult Guidance Initiative. The pilot projects will end in 2006. It is hoped they will be spread out nationwide after that date.

Eileen Fitzpatrick, Acting Director of NCGE - the European Dimension.

The European Union are very keen on guidance for 2 reasons:

- To support lifelong learning
- To support mobility within the EU

The EU feels that lifelong learning should be supported by lifelong guidance. NCGE is one of 65 National Resource Centres of Guidance based in 31 countries. These centres aim to develop the European dimension in guidance and counselling, education and training.

Useful websites:

www.qualifax.ie – information on HE courses in Ireland

www.ploteus.net – portal on learning opportunities throughout the European space

Guidance Counsellors in Ireland tend to be a bit isolated. Similarly, input, output and evaluation mechanisms are quite weak. Delivery methods are fragmented and there are many gaps. Also there is a big weakness in the provision of careers information – little available that is centralised and reliable. These weaknesses were identified in a recent OECD report.

Guidance is seen as vital in assisting Ireland's move towards a knowledge based economy. A national forum has now been established. The first big problem has been deciding what is meant by guidance. The forum is looking at quality marks and competencies for Guidance Counsellors.

The afternoon of day one was mainly spent discussing the systems of guidance and counselling in operation in the countries of the various participants in this Academia programme. It was clear that in many of the countries careers guidance and counselling on personal issues are often combined into one role. The Connexions Service strategy in place in the UK certainly did not appear inferior to any of the systems described and indeed, seemed, to offer a more comprehensive careers information, advice and guidance service than outlined elsewhere!

For the next two days we were split into smaller groups and I was partnered with Rosa Rubio Prado from Spain and Kristi Kuurme from Estonia.

Day Two: St. Mary's Holy Faith School, Glasnevin, Dublin 11- Carol Downey (Post Primary Guidance Counsellor) and Irene Doyle (Student Guidance Counsellor)

St. Mary's is a 650 strong single sex girls' school. The intention had been for us to spend time with students in their Transition Year (TY). However, due to the TY putting on a play that evening the whole group had unbeknownst to Carol been given the day off to prepare. So Carol kindly took us on a tour of the school and introduced us to many of her delightful colleagues and their students.

The intake of St. Mary's was described as 30% middle class and 70% working class. The school does not have 'disadvantaged status' which would afford it extra resources. However, the school does have an access programme with University College, Dublin for students of St. Mary's termed 'disadvantaged'.

The Transition Year(TY)

This is Year 4. Traditionally in the Irish system there has not been a Year 4. Students completed Junior Certificate in 10 or 11 subjects in Year 3 and then returned (immediately after the summer break) to Year 5 to begin studying for their Leaving certificate in 7 or 8 subjects.

The TY was introduced for those students who needed additional support or were maybe younger than the rest of the cohort. This year at St. Mary's there are 36 students in the TY. These students do projects, work experience and some go on overseas trips e.g. some this year are going to Poland, some are coming to the UK to watch Chelsea. Indeed, the principal has introduced football and basketball into the school and these have proved very popular options with the girls.

The aims of the YT are:

- Education for maturity with the emphasis on personal development including social awareness and increased social competence
- The promotion of general, technical and academic skills with an emphasis on inter disciplinary and self directed learning
- Education through experience of adult and working life as a basis for personal development and maturity

Assessment methods include: diaries, oral presentations, practicals, exhibitions, project work, worksheets and written tests. At the end of the year TY certificates are awarded. These can be at one of three levels – distinction, merit and pass.

St. John's Education Centre

This is based at St. Mary's but is not part of the school. The Centre runs two 4 week primary programmes for 11 and 12 year olds; and three 5 week programmes for 13 and 14 year olds.

Each programme has a fixed start and finish date. No more than 8 students are on each programme and only one student from a particular school can attend at any one time. Thirty five schools refer students to St. John's.

No student is forced to attend St. John's. Students are referred if they are displaying signs of emotional or behavioural difficulties including a lack of self esteem or lack of development of social skills.

The Centre makes it clear that it is a support centre NOT a punishment centre. The aim with all students is a successful reintegration into their normal school programme.

The Centre has a code of conduct. This is 'our target is to show respect for others. We do this by:

- Never using put downs
- Being prepared to work promptly
- Listening to the teacher
- Raising our hand to speak
- Avoiding distractions
- Working hard'

Once a student has completed the placement at St. John's and has returned to their school the staff at St. John's will do follow up checks to ensure that the student has reintegrated successfully

Irene Doyle – Student Guidance Counsellor

Irene is a qualified teacher and is now studying part time with the University of Limerick, though at an outreach centre in Dublin, to gain the Graduate Diploma in Career Guidance and Counselling. This is a 2 year part time course. It consists of 9 taught modules; a thesis; a school placement; an

industrial placement; and individual personal counselling with a member of the Irish Association of Counselling Therapists. A candidate must undergo 10 hours of personal counselling. This is confidential but the Counselling Therapist must sign a form to certify that the candidate has undertaken it.

The contact time for the first 3 semesters is 3 hours per Wednesday night and 7 hours every second Saturday. (This may vary from centre to centre) In the fourth semester contact time is reduced to Wednesday nights only. There are also 2 summer schools at the University of Limerick.

The objective of the course is to qualify practicing teachers as Guidance Counsellors. The qualification is recognised by the Irish Department of Education for the purposes of appointment as a Guidance Counsellor in a Second Level school.

The entrance requirements are as follows:

- A degree in education from a concurrent undergraduate programme
- An appropriate Bachelor's degree and higher diploma in education
- An approved equivalent professional teaching qualification
- Graduates with an appropriate level of experience and a particular interest in this area
- Applicants must attend an interview as part of the selection process

Day 3: Ballsbridge College of Further Education, Dublin 4 – Mary Stokes, Guidance Counsellor

Ballsbridge is a second level provision and is part of the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee (VEC). There are approximately 25 institutions in the Dublin VEC with about 10,000 students. Mary is employed by the VEC.

VECs are publicly funded state run organisations and each region or city in Ireland has a VEC.

City of Dublin VEC is unique in Ireland as it has its own psychological service which supports the work of the Guidance Counsellor and will work with students on an interview basis or in a group setting. Parental consent is sought for work with students on a one to one basis. They may also work with staff and family members of particular students.

The Psychological service has to work within ethical practical guidelines. These cover:

- Competence
- Informed consent – for minors this is usually sought at enrolment for guidance, though further consent would be needed for psychological counselling

- Confidentiality
- Clients in crisis
- Minors i.e. under 18 clients
- Referral
- Record keeping and record storage – all records are paper based and due to the Data Protection and Freedom of Information Acts it was felt there was little thought of moving to computerised records.
- Procedural and legal issues
- Guidelines on the protection, access and control of psychological information

All courses at Ballsbridge College are one year in duration. The subjects offered are:

- Computerised office skills for adults
- Computerised business studies
- International event management
- Web authoring and multimedia
- English as a foreign language and media studies
- Office systems
- International aid and development studies
- Marketing, advertising and management
- English as a foreign language and business communication
- Recruitment and human resource studies
- Auctioneering, estate agency and valuation

Entry is on a first come, first served basis providing candidates have a leaving certificate or equivalent. The student body is 61% Irish; the remainder are from all over the world including Russia, China, Africa and Brazil, though the next biggest group of students are from Spain (14%). Only 2% of the student body are from the UK.

Overseas non EC students have to pay course fees of E4000 per annum. EC students have to pay a one off fee of E150 only.

Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS)

This scheme allows unemployed adults to return to education without affecting their benefits. Ballsbridge College has 26 places on this scheme out of a total of 1,200 places in the Dublin VEC as a whole.

To be eligible for a place on VTOS you must be:

- Over 21
- Been unemployed for 6 months or more or be in receipt of a variety of benefits

There is a parallel scheme called Back to Education but this is slightly less financially advantageous to participants than VTOS.

Ringsend Technical Institute

At lunchtime we were taken to a nearby school, Ringsend Technical Institute. There we met the principal, Charles McManus and the Guidance Counsellor, Ann Mathews.

Ringsend's student body is 165 students from the ages of 12 to 18 years old. The school offers junior and leaving certificates and a full time IT programme for adults and a part time introduction to computers course. Both of these courses run during the day. The school also runs a night school programme offering mainly 'hobby' type courses which has over 1000 participants. There are other out of hours uses too e.g. youth service run clubs and local primary schools use the premises to run extra hours tuition clubs.

When Ann, the guidance counsellor joined us she had just completed transition tests on the 26 new enrollers for September 2005. These tests are used to determine streaming and identify need. Ringsend has 'disadvantaged status' and via this the school has a tie in with Dublin Institute of Technology (IT). Through this tie in Dublin IT will accept Ringsend students with lower grades and there will also be some financial and mentoring advantages for these students.

Disadvantaged status is determined by the number of students at an institution who have household income of less than E44,000 per annum and neither parent/carer has attended third level education i.e. Higher Education (HE)

There are also foundation courses available which Ann thought offered good preparation for students moving into HE. Ringsend students can access one at Trinity College, Dublin which serves 7 Higher Education Institutions.

In the afternoon we returned to Ballsbridge College and visited several courses and talked to some students.

Useful websites:

www.ballsbridgecollege.com

www.cao.ie – the Irish University clearing system

Day 4 (am): FAS- Sharon McCarthy

FAS is Ireland's National Employment service. It was established in 1988 to act as the Training and employment authority. It is 'dual stranded' – FAS Employment Services and Local Employment Services (LES).

FAS has 530 staff nationwide in 63 offices, 300 of these are Employment Service Officers. The aim is to help job seekers into the labour market.

There are several target groups:

- Clients referred under the National Employment Action Plan (NEAP)

- Early school leavers
- Long term unemployed
- Disabled people
- Clients unplaced from FAS training programmes
- Job changers
- Employees facing redundancy

Local Employment Services (LES) was established in 1995. It has 340 staff at 27 locations of which around 180 are 'mediators'. The mission is to provide an intensive guidance service to the most disadvantaged in terms of the Labour Market e.g. those unemployed for over 12 months and their dependents, travellers, lone parents, people with a disability etc.

FAS and LES work very closely together. LES is complementary to FAS' work and LES centres are based in areas of high unemployment or of particular disadvantage. In some rural areas FAS and LES staff may provide clinics on one or two days a week at other organisations' premises.

National Employment Action Plan (NEAP) clients are referred to FAS by the Department of Family and Social Welfare, with whom it is jointly implemented. NEAP was commenced in 1998 and is a preventative strategy. It is focused on early and systematic interventions with unemployed people. The current unemployment rate in Ireland is 4.2% of which about 15% is the long term (over 12 months) unemployed. Since it was started NEAP has been extended to anyone who has been unemployed for 6 months.

Many NEAP clients undertake a Pathways programme. These last 2 weeks and participants are referred by Employment Service Officers or mediators. The programme's aim is to change attitudes of individuals towards employment and training. At the end of the programme all participants get an action plan to work through with their Employment Service Officer. In 2004 1000 clients went through the Pathways programme.

Some who complete are classed as NPR or Not Progression Ready. This is usually due to literacy or addiction issues. For these clients a high support process has been developed. This involves a multi agency approach with case conferencing as a key feature. The high support process is open ended and is determined by the needs of the client.

All who approach FAS are assessed and based on this clients may be directed to a FAS Training Centre, other training e.g. community training centres, intensive guidance or self service support e.g. kiosks, internet or national call centre.

All FAS centres offer free phone, fax and photocopying services for job seekers.

Education and Training for FAS Guidance Practitioners

- Certificate, Diploma and Higher Diploma Programmes in Adult Guidance and Counselling – NUI Maynooth
- National Resource Centre for Guidance includes a module on the Induction programme for Employment Service Officers
- Disability Awareness training
- Competency framework for Employment Service Officers

Useful website: www.fas.ie

Day 4 (pm): Tallaght Institute of Technology, Dublin 24 – Marie Kielty, Guidance Counsellor

Tallaght Institute of Technology (IT) provides Third level education. There are 14 Institutes of Technology in Ireland. These were established in the 1970s to provide regional access to Higher Education. The 7 Irish universities are mainly in the big cities.

At third level the courses offered are at 3 levels:

- Level 6 – 2 years Higher Certificates
- Level 7 – 3 year ordinary pass degrees
- Level 8 – 4 years honours degrees

Most university degrees courses are 4 year degrees with honours. The levels refer to the 10 level Irish National Framework of Qualifications – similar to the UK National Vocational Qualifications Framework, but to this observer far easier to understand. The framework allows what are termed 'ladder progressions' e.g. students can complete a 2 year Higher Certificate and, depending on attainment, do a further year to complete an ordinary pass degree and so on and so forth.

For more information on the Irish National Framework of Qualifications see: www.fetac.ie and www.hetac.ie the websites of the Irish awards bodies.

Marie provides the following to the students at Tallaght:

- Guidance Activities – individuals are allocated 30 minutes per interview; groups are arranged via academic departments or in the careers centre and could be around career planning, job search, CVs, guest speakers etc.
- Maintains the careers library section of the main college library

Resources: all ITs in Ireland only have one careers adviser per institution. There are 2,500 full time students at Tallaght and Marie is the careers adviser. However, Cork IT has 9,000 full time students and still only has one full time careers adviser, though that adviser receives administrative support, unlike Marie.

Tallaght has about 60 mature students, classed as those over 23, and there are also about 1,000 students on part time evening courses.

Recent Developments:

- In the library paper based employer files have been phased out in favour of web based information
- Similarly practically all paper based vacancy files have been phased out in favour of electronically held information
- A Careers Management Skills Module has been introduced
- An association of careers advisers in ITs throughout Ireland has been established - ITCAN

Conclusion:

The visit was a thoroughly enjoyable and very interesting experience. Thanks must go to the staff at NCGE, especially Jane Beatty, for arranging such a varied and stimulating programme and to our hosts for putting it into practice (special thanks must go to Carol Downey for agreeing to act as a host at the very last moment due to an unforeseeable hitch and for lending me her mobile phone!).

Thanks too to all my Guidance Counsellor colleagues for being such interesting and pleasant company.

Thanks too, of course, to Careers Europe for sending me, my employers Greater Merseyside Connexions for letting me go and, of course, to the Leonardo Da Vinci Exchange Programme for making it all possible.

At present the future of guidance activities in England is under review. Various ideas of the future structure have been leaked by Government, though no decisions have been reached it seems unlikely that the status quo is an option.

One of the models proposed is for guidance staff to be employed by schools. Superficially this would appear to follow the Irish model. Yet there is grave concern in England that if implemented this would cause a loss in independence and impartiality and, hence, quality of guidance available to young people as head teachers would insist that the interests on their institution and not of the individual young person would be paramount.

I raised this point with a delegate at the wine reception at the National College of Ireland we attended on the Thursday evening. He was dismissive of the idea, but did allow that the post 16 situation in the two countries had significant differences. It also occurred that the school based guidance counsellors' qualifications and training route bears no resemblance to that of careers advisers and now Personal advisers in the UK. In Ireland the Guidance Counsellors are trained teachers first and foremost. The guidance qualification gives them an enhanced status in the school. Additionally, they offer guidance in a far wider context than just careers issues. Obviously this bears comparison with the breadth of services offered by Personal Advisers in the UK, but one of the rationales for the proposed changes in the UK is that the enhanced role of Personal Advisers has led to a reduction in the quality

and quantity of careers advice and guidance available to students. School employed advisers may not be expected to carry out this dual role if the responsibility for providing careers advice is, in the face of all informed and knowledgeable comment, handed to head teachers.

The Irish system seemed to have much strength, but from what I saw I cannot in all honesty say it is superior or inferior to the system in England. What I can say categorically is that the importance of guidance is recognised in Ireland at a time when its value seems to be increasingly questioned by politicians in England. I can also state that such exchange visits are extremely valuable to the participants but as the pace of change in education and guidance moves at an increasingly dizzying pace such opportunities to observe, discuss and reflect become ever more vital to professionals involved in these spheres.

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21/3/05