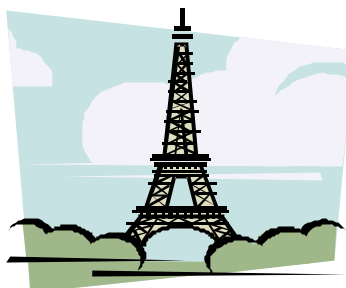


# EUROPEAN PLACEMENT – PARIS, FRANCE (4<sup>th</sup>–9<sup>th</sup> April 2005)

## JUDITH ORR



### 1. The run-up

Notification was circulated to CfBT Advice, Guidance and Connexions staff in November 2004 inviting applications to be submitted by 7<sup>th</sup> December for Guidance Exchange programmes the next spring/summer. These exchanges are organised each year by Careers Europe as part of their Leonardo da Vinci programme. Spoken knowledge of the language of the host country was required with a range of EU countries offering placements. Having studied French as part of my degree, France was an obvious choice, although it being over 20 years since I had been a student, my spoken French was very rusty!

My initial choice of placement was full by the time I submitted my application and I therefore opted for my second choice: FO7–‘Politiques Educatives et Egalites entre Filles et Garcons’ in Paris. I thought that to research equal opportunities amongst girls and boys in another country would prove interesting and educative, and I intended to compare how far the country had progressed with implementing their legislation and what positive courses of action they were taking to promote gender equality compared to the UK.

By attending the placement I hoped to gain an insight into the educational systems not only of my host country, but also those of the countries of the other participants. I aimed to share good practice and hoped to highlight successful projects and ways of working within the UK, bearing in mind the Equal Opportunities theme.



### 2. The arrival

I was given the option of choosing my mode of transport to Paris and living in London chose to go by Eurostar the journey taking only about 3 hours from door to door. The speed and ease of the journey made me really feel a part of Europe from the start. Finding my hotel, that evening I went to explore the local neighbourhood, finding somewhere to eat and relax in anticipation of my busy week ahead.

### 3. Day One

We were introduced to Dominique Torsat, Chargee de mission Egalite/Parite and the organiser of the programme. I also met the other delegates – 3 from Spain and one from Norway. We were all guidance practitioners in our respective countries and it was my fellow delegates who contributed hugely towards what turned out to be a truly enjoyable week.



We were given the programme for the week, as shown below.

	<b>Matin</b>	<b>Après-midi</b>
<b>Lundi 04</b>	<b>9h45</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Presentation du system educatif francais</li> <li>- Presentation du stage</li> </ul> <b>12h</b> Presentation des services d'orientation  Dejeuner en commun au 'Solferino'.	<b>14h</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Les politiques d'egalite entre les filles et les garcons, les femmes et les hommes dans le system educatif francais</li> <li>- Histoire de la scolarisation des filles</li> <li>- Presentation de l'action d'une academie (Paris)</li> </ul>
<b>Mardi 05</b>	<b>9h30</b> Matinee chez IBM Rencontre avec l'association Inter'Elles autour de l'egalite professionnelle	<b>14h30</b> Rencontre avec le service des droits des femmes et de l'egalite: Une loi sur l'egalite salariale, un label egalite pour les entreprises, une campagne grand public .....
<b>Mercredi 06</b>	<b>9h30</b> Une matinee au centre d'information et d'orientation (C.O.) du 20 arrondissement	<b>14h30</b> Echange sur les politiques d'egalite
<b>Jeudi 07</b>	<b>9h15</b> Prevention des violences faites aux femmes  <b>10h30</b> Intervention du Ministere de l'agriculture: des action pour favoriser le respect mutuel entre les filles et les garcons dans les etablissements scolaires	<b>14h30</b> Visite d'un lycee general et technologique: le lycee Jacquard (Paris 19e)   DINER en commun
<b>Vendredi 08</b>	<b>10h</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Visite de l'Observatoire de la parite, une specificite francaise</li> <li>- Evaluation du Stage</li> </ul>	<b>13h</b> Fin des travaux

Dominique Torsat had put together an interesting programme for the delegates. She had arranged a tour of different educational and vocational training establishments, together with ministerial visits in order for us to gain an overview of the educational, guidance and legislative systems and voluntary organisations in Paris, pertinent to Equal Opportunities. The Academie de Paris promotes 'Egalites des Chances' and in 2004-5 a campaign was introduced to enlighten students, families and educational teams on the wide range of professional choices available to both boys and girls and to highlight the struggle against preconceived ideas and stereotyping. It was felt that today, gender equality is more than ever an issue and there is a need to invent new strategies and methods to take action towards equality between men and women.



As a result, the Charter for Gender Equality was presented to the Prime Minister on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2004 and its five major objectives were:

- **Political parity and equal access to decision-making:** to share responsibility and equal citizenship;
- **Professional equality:** for a better contribution of women to economic development and equal employment opportunities;
- **Respect of dignity:** reinforced rights, autonomy and citizenship access;
- **Conciliation of family life and professional life:** for a new balancing of social roles between men and women;
- **European and international solidarity:** to promote the fundamental rights of individuals.

Each day we met at different venues and on the first day it was at the Ministère de l'éducation nationale in the centre of Paris. A large part of the day was spent understanding the education system in France and also getting to know other members of the group and finding out about the guidance systems in their respective countries.

Traditional French education aims at providing every child with equal opportunities and successful integration into society. Primary school is the first step and education is compulsory up till age 16. As in the UK however, most pupils now continue until they are 21 or 22 years old and education is becoming increasingly more complex, lasting longer and continuing throughout life.

Created in 1808, the French Baccalaureate is the examination taken in Upper Secondary School which validates the end of secondary school studies and determines entry to university and is thus the first university qualification. The Bac has continued to develop and expand and it has opened itself up to the new fields of knowledge so as to keep abreast with the knowledge and expertise required from students, as well as with the increase in the number of students taking the exam. It has gradually broadened its scope to include the many training programmes, which lead to professional specialisation.

Today it still is the French national examination that embodies national equality. It comprises nine or ten compulsory written or oral examinations, together with optional ones. Over the years it has become available to more and more of the population – in 2002 61% graduated.

There are three types of Baccalaureate:

- **The Baccalaureat general (academic)** – since 1993, three categories have been in existence: 1. Economics and social sciences 2. Arts 3. Sciences. These three academic Bacs qualify students for entry to higher education: universities, grandes écoles and technical colleges for example.
- **The Baccalaureat technologique (technological)** – created in 1968 combines general education with technological training. Students generally continue their studies in polytechnics.
- **The Baccalaureat professionnel (vocational)** – has existed since 1985. Vocational Bacs satisfy company requirements by supplying them with workshop technicians, employees and highly skilled workers.

**Vocational Education** – This has been radically updated over the last few years in France and now offers two different ways of learning; students have a choice between studying full time in a Vocational College or doing an apprenticeship. College is an upper secondary school which admits students from secondary school where they qualify in a vocational area after 1, 2, or 3 years. Apprenticeships combine training with an employer and courses given in a training school, much as in the UK.



## **Day 2**

Today, in the morning, we visited IBM at La Defense. This was my first visit to this part of Paris and I was hugely impressed. There appeared to be obvious rivalry amongst the various organisations however as to who could build the tallest, most impressive office building! At IBM we were given a talk by two very professional women on the problems facing the IT industry in recruiting females. From early on in schools, girls are not choosing to study sciences, maths or IT and they talked about the programmes and promotions they had in mind to promote the industry to females. We received a booklet: 'Femmes en maths ..... pourquoi pas vous?', detailing an exhibition put on by the 'femmes et mathématiques' association which was exhibited in schools, colleges and universities. It showed portraits of 16 women who all had studied maths to a higher level and detailed their varied career paths. Its aim was to show the variety of possible careers open to you with a maths qualification and to combat stereotyping. They saw the role of the careers adviser as being pivotal in directly influencing the mind set of young girls in school and in trying to break down the barriers and stereotypes that still persist. We discussed positive action as opposed to positive discrimination in recruitment and the problems they were facing which are obviously problems not peculiar just to France.

In the afternoon we visited the Office for Women's Rights and Equality. Their aim is to promote equal opportunities in the workplace initially by playing a part in furthering equal opportunity between boys and girls in the educational system. Their objectives are to encourage non-restrictive career choices for women early on, to eliminate discrimination and violence in the schools and to increase awareness and training among the educators. They use targeted funding to encourage the private sector to promote equality in the workplace and facilitate the professional integration of women through close collaboration with public-sector employment specialists, with a view, in particular, to increasing the proportion of women benefiting from state-funded employment schemes.

They also play an active role in promoting and defending women's rights:

- By combating violence against women, tackling sexual harassment in the workplace and supporting associations working to assist prostitutes
- By carrying out a monitoring function aimed at the protection of women's rights both on an individual and society-wide basis.

### **Key Dates:**

- 1944 Women win the right to vote and to stand for election
- 1965 Women may have an occupation without their husband's consent
- 1967 Contraception is made legal
- 1970 Parental authority replaces paternal authority
- 1972 The principle of equal pay for women and men for work of equal value is recognised
- 1974 Contraception fees are reimbursed by the national health insurance
- 1975 Voluntary termination of pregnancy is made legal
- 1983 Equality between women and men in the workplace is enshrined in law
- 1985 Spouses are recognised as equal in marital settlements and parents as equal in administering the assets of the minor child
- 1992 Sexual harassment in the work place is sanctioned by law
- 1999 The Constitution is revised to decree that 'the law promotes equal access to electoral mandates and elective functions for both women and men'.

### **Key Figures:**

Women represent:

- 51.3% of the population of France ie. 30 million people
- 45.4% of the working population, compared to 34% thirty-five years ago; but women's wages are on average 25% lower than those of men



It appeared from first impressions that centres in England are a lot more inviting and client centred. Careers advisers in France are obviously not required to do any sort of tracking and little inter-agency work seems to be carried out. There was very little literature by way of handouts, prospectuses or information leaflets for the young people and the atmosphere was formal rather than relaxed as I feel it now is in our Connexions centres.

On the afternoon of this day we were allowed some free time and chose to spend it as a group doing some sightseeing. We visited the Sacre Coeur and had lunch together whilst exchanging ideas about guidance in our respective countries. I found these informal get togethers rewarding and informative and felt I gained as much from these as from the more organised, formal presentations. As one of the Spanish delegates was actually from the Island of Majorca his work was considerably different from mine, for example, the range of employment opportunities on the island obviously being limited and his guidance having to reflect this to a certain extent. He spent half of his time doing guidance work and half doing vocational training in a college.



#### Day 4

On the afternoon of day 4 we visited a Lycee on the outskirts of Paris. The journey by Metro was quite interesting. Most of our other venues had been in the centre of Paris where the wealth and opulence of the area was manifested in the beautiful buildings and beautiful people! Heading further out west the environment changed considerably and was reminiscent of heading out west from Waterloo Station. The lycee was in a multi-cultural area similar to a London suburb and I felt on arriving that I could have been standing outside my local FE College in Acton, West London. The majority of students seemed to be either black or from ethnic minorities and their dress was identical to that worn by the youth in London – trousers so large that they were falling down, expensive designer trainers, mobile phone in hand etc. etc.

The feeling in France is that that vocational training has made a significant contribution to reducing the school dropout rate. It has overcome its image as an option for underachievers and has gained a reputation for excellence. Links with the world of work have been strengthened and vocational training is now an important part of the French education and training system. It is based on a careful balance between academic education, vocational training and links with the world of work. It enables vocational students to access careers in all sectors, without losing sight of the importance of academic education. Students can choose to go to a vocational school (lycee professionnel) at the age of 15 on leaving lower secondary school. These establishments prepare students for a variety of vocational qualifications, including vocational Baccalaureates. With the re-working of vocational qualifications came a revolution in related teaching methods, as the academic education programmes were enriched to better meet the needs and requirements of industry. Two initiatives stand out – **the multi-disciplinary project work**, in small groups, designed to develop knowledge and skills relevant to the world of work. Based on the concept of teamwork, this type of project work teaches how to acquire work and research methods, reinforces the work-related aspects of the training programme and helps student to map out their personal development and career plans. **Citizenship Education** has been introduced into all secondary schools to ensure that each student benefits from a comprehensive citizenship education (Civics, Law and Society).

In 2002 1 secondary school student out of 3 was in a vocational secondary school (lycee professionnel) and there were 1,742 vocational secondary schools. There were 371,500 apprentices and 1,215 apprentice training centres. 47% of those in vocational secondary schools are female.

**Recent Policy Developments** – Building bridges between lower secondary schools (colleges) and vocational secondary schools helps struggling students come up with a career plan, revives their interest in academic education and gives them a better chance of leaving school with

qualifications. Pupils at lower secondary schools have the opportunity to take some vocational subjects at a vocational secondary school, or spend sometime in companies, from as early as year 9 at the age of 14. With the emphasis now in schools in the UK on work related learning this is obviously an idea that we have taken from the success of our counterparts in Europe. They value the idea of work experience and its contribution to skills development and it is now integrated into national codes of practice for work and education.

As early as 1992, the law regarding the validation of work experience made it possible for any person with at least five years of experience in the workplace to gain exemption from the exams required for certain qualifications, based on the recognition of existing skills and knowledge either acquired in employment or through voluntary work.

In the evening we dined together and Madame Torsat brought along her partner and the organiser of the Stage Academia programme in France.

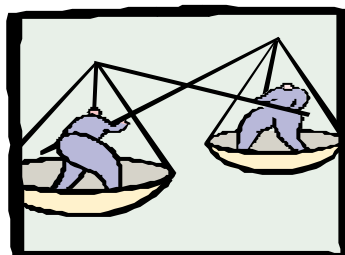


## Day 5

### Visit to l'Observatoire de la Parite

This is a watchdog, a trans-parliamentary commission that has been in existence for 10 years, to evaluate equality and parity between men and women. It comprises a team of 33 members and employs three full time workers plus councillors who are voted on to a board and are chosen for their competences and experiences and who include researchers, sociologists, media, politicians etc. Jacques Chirac introduced the law of equality between the sexes in the year 2000, having to change parts of the constitution to introduce the idea of equality. The Observatoire regularly monitors and produces statistics regarding equal opportunities in regional, cantonale and European elections with regards to women in respect of them being elected and represented, particularly in Parliament. The Observatoire produces a report, every two years for the Premier Ministre who must present it to Parliament and the public. As in the UK, women are still severely under-represented and glass ceilings (and doors) abound! Women fail to get 'informal' training and have to build up their own networks (even to be elected). Although by law they are now obliged to have parity amongst candidates put forward for election, there is no obligation to have females in the top positions and consequently women are rarely given powerful positions. Only 10% of local mayors across the country are female. The Observatoire makes recommendations and monitors the various organisations to ensure that they are sticking to the letter of the law and can enforce penalties for not respecting parity.

Whereas in England we have the three laws that relate to Equal Opportunities (Sex, Race and Disability) when I asked about laws covering race relations I was told there was no law governing this and that everyone was considered a 'citoyen francais' regardless of their ethnicity.



## **Conclusion**

As a group we 'clicked' from the start and met socially each evening to eat and talk. We would often only return to our hotel rooms at 2.00am, and even though our ages ranged from mid-twenties to early fifties, there seemed to be a common bond between us. Spending time alone in my hotel gave me time to reflect on my own practise and to put my own work into a wider context and the whole experience proved to be an invaluable experience with regards to my own self-development.

It became obvious that in all European countries guidance practitioners are tackling similar problems with the young people with whom they were working and that a large part of our daily work is spent tackling the same social and economic issues. We all recognised the concern brought about by asylum seekers in our respective countries and the fact that ethnic tensions seem to be universal. The same issues were highlighted in each of our countries as being a cause for concern – high drop out rates from college, teenage pregnancies, issues with drugs, continued stereotyping etc. Changes in the labour market also are having the same knock on effects on education pan-Europe with feed-back from employers being that young people are leaving education but not necessarily with the right skills to equip them for the world of work. On the other hand young people are continuing their education to a high level only to find that when they join the labour market there are not necessarily the range of opportunities available to them at the right level.

I was able to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the guidance systems in the UK, which compared favourably with some of the other European countries. The Connexions service has made some positive ways forward with regards to multi-agency work and our help with the 'disaffected' must surely be second to none. Equal Opportunities in all the European countries has moved on considerably over the last 5 years but it was obvious that we still have a long way to go to break down stereotypes that are ingrained before the young person has even started school.

As a guidance professional, I sometimes feel however, that my role at counsellor has taken over, the two roles being still quite distinct on the continent. In most other European countries, guidance practitioners have a degree or masters in Psychology. In Spain they are also required to having a teaching qualification as they are usually teachers of psychology. However I did feel that as a profession they somehow seem to be more highly regarded than we are in England.

Whilst working hard throughout the week, we still found time to relax and do some sight-seeing and as the weather was so perfect I can truly say that Paris in the spring time is a must!

Thank you to Careers Europe, the Academia and the Leonardo da Vinci project for giving me the opportunity to spend 5 truly enjoyable days in such a wonderful city and for the chance to meet some fellow European guidance practitioners whom I now refer to as friends!

