

**Report on Careers Europe Exchange to the
Czech Republic
7th – 11th March 2005**



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Introduction

The Academia trip to Prague was organised through Careers Europe and funded through the EU Leonardo programme. It exists to facilitate the exchange of information, ideas and good practice between guidance professionals. The experience is re-invigorating, enables you to learn lots about careers guidance practice across Europe and helps you to reflect on your own practice.

Country Facts

What do you think when you think of Prague: Paris of the East, City of a Hundred Spires, The Golden City, James Bond Movies, Skoda, Hen and Stag parties.....? Prague is all of these things and more.

You can feel the history ooze out of the Gothic, Baroque and Art Nouveau architecture. It seems that, at some point, the Czech Republic's neighbours have all wanted some part of this beautiful country and, as a result, the city is a delicious fusion of east and west, communist and western, old and new with a dash of intrigue thrown in. It's a country of contradictions: on one hand it has this old and very colourful history but on the other it is a new country, formed in 1993. It boasts some very clean and efficient transport infrastructure, renowned Universities, fantastic shops and restaurants and, perhaps most importantly, some really friendly and approachable people.

The Czech Republic, with a population of 10.2 million, is a landlocked country which borders Germany, Poland, Slovakia and Austria. It liberated itself from communism in 1989, became the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic before splitting into the Czech Republic and Slovakia in 1993. The Czech Republic is now a member of the EU. The economy, which was founded on industrial production, is becoming increasingly service driven. Unemployment has also risen over the last 10 years to just under 10%. The average wage is Kc17, 418 = £435.50 per month. The Czech Republic's major trading partner is Germany (40% of exports) and one of her better known exports is Skoda cars.

Agriculture	4.5%
Industry	39.4%
Services	54.6%

The beautiful capital, Prague, has a population of 1.3 million with a quarter of a million immigrants with permanent residence permit or visa over 90 days.

Daily Diary

Click here for the [tourist's view of Prague](#)

Monday 7th March

Ten participants from Spain, Greece, France, Germany, Norway, Scotland and Northern Ireland were let loose in Prague as part of an Academia project, organised through Careers Europe and funded by the European Commission Leonardo Project. We were from a variety of different backgrounds and included two teachers, two labour office employees, an adult guidance counsellor, someone from the Ministry of Education in Spain, a psychologist, a Vocational Guidance Counsellor with the Europe Service of the Federal Employment Agency (Germany) and two Careers Advisers.

We were met in our hotel by one of our hosts – Zuzana – who took us to the Centre of Higher Education Studies in the centre of Prague, which nestles in one of small winding streets underneath Charles Bridge.

Here we were heard presentations from our hosts about the National Training Fund – National Resource Centre for Vocational Guidance; the socio-economic and cultural background and the education and guidance system in the Czech Republic.

The National Training Fund

- Established in 1994 by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs as a public benefit organisation
- It aims to contribute to the social and economic transformation taking place within the Czech Republic.
- Comprised of different units, one of which is the National Resource Centre for Vocational Guidance. This unit was established in 1998 and is part of the European network of national resource centres (in 32 European countries). It is supported financially by the Leonardo da Vinci programme
- Focus of NRVG is sharing of information about national education and counselling systems and to promote mobility between the Member States of the EU/EEA. In addition the Czech NRVG unit contributes to a variety of different national and international projects.
- For further information on the euroguidance network click [here](#).

Education System

In order to understand the guidance and counselling system, it's important to understand the [education](#) system. A country's education system drives the type and timing of career education and guidance interventions. The Czech Republic is no different.

- Compulsory schooling is from age 6 -15 years.
- The first stage of basic education (our primary schooling) takes place between the ages of 6 – 10 years.

- Students then progress to the second stage of basic education (Lower Secondary) between 11-15 years.
- From the age of 15 students can progress to three different types of schools:
 - a) General Secondary Schools or Gymnasia (these prepare students for University and are attended by 17% of students). Students can apply to attend this school early at either age 11 or 13 years.
 - b) Secondary Technical Schools - normally 4 years but also possible to do 2 and 3 year programmes. 40% of programme devoted to general subjects, 60% to vocational. Option to enter tertiary education or to gain an occupational qualification upon completion of technical school. Approx 38% of young people opt for this school.
 - c) Secondary Vocational School – normally 3 year programmes (1 or 2 years also available). Approx 45% opt for this school. Offer vocational training at apprenticeship level
- Since 1989, there has been a drive to decentralise and give more autonomy to schools and local authorities.
- The education system places a lot of emphasis on competitive entry exams set by individual schools. There is a myriad of different schools with different qualifications.
- Decision making happens quite early on e.g. a student wanting to start a vocational school at 15 years would need to make their choice at age 14. There is therefore demand for counsellors to help guide parents and students about when to access secondary school, which school might be best and what their potential is.
- The UK education system is much simpler but nearly 98% of Czech young people have a secondary education certificate of some level – well above the OECD average.

Guidance and Counselling System in the Czech Republic

- Two main systems for the provision of guidance and counselling.
- These come under the umbrella of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS) and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA).
- MoEYS is responsible for what happens within schools while MoLSA is concerned with the labour offices.
- Between them they offer education and pedagogical counselling, psychological counselling and career guidance.
- Each school has their own educational counsellor (a teacher with only with 1-3 hours per week devoted to counselling). Career guidance is only one part of their role. If the problem is more complex, the young person can access an external psychology service (employment of dedicated School Psychologists is beginning to happen) or the local labour office.
- Career education has become firmly embedded within all basic (since 2001) and secondary schools (since 2002). Schools are left to choose whether to integrate it into the curriculum or teach it as a separate subject. There are specific units available – “career choice” at Basic School and “Interaction with the world of work” at Secondary School.

- The Ministry of Labour also offers career guidance under the auspices of labour offices. They work in cooperation with schools and their guidance and counselling systems. Schools visit the centres to use their counsellors and resources (see Tuesday's diary entry for further information). Labour offices also provide career guidance to people of all ages, although the services tend to be used by those who are unemployed rather than all adults.

Afternoon

Presentations from Participants - What did I learn from other European Countries?

Each of us was asked to do a 20 minute presentation on our education and counselling system.

- A lot of other European guidance professionals are either psychologists or teachers (or both)
- Our Scottish education system is actually quite simple and generally affords the same opportunity to all without competitive exam entry to secondary education
- Apprenticeship training can be very different in other EU countries, with most of the training taking place at School/Colleges.
- Our system has a fair bit in common with our Scandinavian neighbours especially with regards to lifelong learning and all age guidance.
- In Germany, there is a separation between vocational (provided by the Federal Employment Agency) and educational guidance. The Europe Service of the Federal Employment Service has a regional office for partner organisations in the UK at Bremen (www.europaserviceba.de (in German))
- Greece – a system of orientation and counselling centres are in place across the country and within 200 high schools. It offers career counselling and information to students and coordinates teachers involved in vocational education and advice at schools.
- In Catalonia, the guidance and counselling service is carried out by psychologists with teaching and assessment functions, employed by the school – this lead to a debate on impartiality and neutrality!
- One of our Spanish representatives from the Basque Country is involved in teaching students enterprise skills, including a unit on self-employment. This may be of particular interest to our Enterprise in Education colleagues.
- All of the countries represented are trying to develop strategies for working with young people who drop out of school – none feel that they are winning this particular battle.

Tuesday 8th March

Morning

Centre for Integration of Foreigners <http://www.cicpraha.org>

- Staffed by social workers who work with immigrants throughout the Czech Republic. Much of their work involves helping immigrants navigate Czech systems – employment, education, housing, health care etc. They liaise with other NGOs who work with this group. Many of their clients are from the former Soviet Union.
- Funding is from UNHCR and Czech Republic Government.
- Are involved with England and Sweden in a project called EQUAL. “Its mission is to promote a more inclusive work life through fighting discrimination and exclusion”. It’s funded through the European Social Fund. More information from <http://www.sweb.cz/wic.wip/>
- Their spokesperson noted that they “only” spoke Russian, English and Czech!

Afternoon

Pedagogical – Psychological Counselling Centre in Prague, Ltd.

This is a good example of where the focus is more on educational counselling than career guidance. The task of this organisation is on helping the student and parent choose the right school. Personality and IQ tests are used to do this.

- First private counselling service in Czech Republic (est. 1993)
- Similar to that provided by the state albeit that the clients tend to be different. It is available to those from age 3 to 19 years.
- Types of issues that they deal with: those with specific learning disabilities, study problems or behaviour issues. A very high proportion of their clients are those age 11, preparing to move to secondary education.
- They will give advice about the exact school that will match the child’s personality.
- They also counsel those in schools who are finding transition difficult or who made the wrong choice.
- Their main clients at age 15 years are those who have no idea about what they want to do or those who do have ideas but the parents resist.

I couldn’t really relate this to any particular UK service. It really is a service that is driven by the complex nature of the education system. Perhaps, it has shades of educational psychology work in it.

Wednesday 9th March

Morning

Early start (7.30 am) to catch the Student Bus to Brno. Brno is the second city in the Czech Republic and is situated in Southern Moravia.

Labour Office, Brno

- Similar to our Job Centre Plus network. It offers a range of initiatives and targets specific client groups e.g. people with disabilities, long term unemployed, job seekers over 50 years etc.
- The main challenges are lack of job vacancies, incompatibility between labour demand and supply and not enough time or staff to work with clients.
- What is *different* about the Czech labour office is that it has a guidance department specialising in vocational guidance and has school leavers and young people as a target group.

Information and Counselling Centre for Career Choice at the Brno Labour Office

- This facility is most similar to career guidance in the UK.
- The Labour Office cooperates with educational institutions, educational counsellors and psychological centres.
- This centre opened in 1994 with other centres opening up in labour offices across the Republic.
- School pupils visit the centres in groups and on an individual basis.
- Counsellors deal with the kind of issues that any careers adviser faces: how to choose, how to prepare for work, employability skills etc.
- They also work with unemployed school leavers on a group and individual basis. Other activities include education fairs, workshops for education counsellors and the collection of learning opportunities in the Brno region.
- Their centre offers fantastic resources. They are mostly paper based but their labour market information is second to none. There are files on each occupation with information on the demand for this type of work compared with similar jobs, interest guides and learning opportunities information on computers, videos showing occupations, a series of leaflets on job search skills and information on studying and working abroad



EURES <http://www.europa.eu.int/eures/home.jsp?lang=en>

- Available at Job Centres/Labour Offices across Europe and via the Internet.
- Information and advice on different aspects of mobility across Europe. Has CV matching facility.
- Approximately 600 EURES advisers in the European network

Afternoon

Student Counselling and Advisory Services at Masaryk University, Brno

- 27, 000 students.
- The Counselling Service has been in operation for 10 years and includes educational (study skills), psychological and careers.
- Approximately 10% of the student population used the service in the last year.
- Facilities are similar to those on offer in UK Student Services departments (CV workshops, interview techniques, employer presentations etc).
- Major difference between UK institutions and Student Services here is that there was no expectation for students to have accessed some self-help measures first.

Thursday 10th March

Morning

National Institute of Technical and Vocational Education

www.nuov.cz (English version available)

- NITVE is a professional, research and educational consultancy organisation run by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport to develop vocational education in the Czech Republic.
- It works in partnership with organisations across Europe
- Develops and implements the secondary school curriculum.
- It also analyses the needs of the labour market and any supply problems i.e. school leaver unemployment and produces materials for pupils, parents and schools
- One of its units is the Centre of Career Counselling. This aims to develop career guidance and strengthen the role of educational counsellors in the field of career guidance.
- It provides a sound research base for its activities and has developed a new career guidance policy (approved Feb 2004) which aims to set up an integrated career guidance and counselling service, raise the profile of career guidance and establish school centres of career guidance and counselling as well as promoting the development of multi media and ICT resources. Many of these are recommendations from the OECD review of Career Guidance in the Czech Republic in 2003.

A UK similarity could be the National Guidance Research Forum (<http://www.guidance-research.org/about-ngrf>) and CRAC.

Afternoon

Higher professional School of Fashion Design and Secondary Technical School of Fashion Design

- Well, what a start to the afternoon! We were treated to a fantastic cat walk fashion show from the students.

This institution offers tertiary (higher professional school) as well as secondary education.

Secondary Technical School

- One of 5 design based schools in the Czech Republic
- Students can join this vocational design school from the age of 15 years.
- 30 students are on the design stream, 60 on the technical stream
- Competitive to enter with entrance exam. Students are assessed on design and technical skills. Students learn about other subjects too e.g. languages, business.

Higher Professional School (Tertiary Education) – only one in the Czech Republic

- Any student with school leaver – maturita – exam can apply
- Must pass an exam i.e. art, languages etc. for entry
- 10 students were accepted last year
- 5 weeks work experience throughout the three years study
- Focus is on fashion design but will study wide range of other subjects.
- *Keen to establish work experience placement overseas – anyone interested?*

Friday 11th March

Morning

Eurodesk and Youth Information Centre

- Apparently, this all started in Scotland (Edinburgh) and is now a feature in 30 European countries. It's a fantastic service that I feel I should have known more about before I went.

What is it?

- It's a service providing European information for young people and youth workers. It's similar to Socrates in that it involves exchanges i.e. youth exchange programmes but also facilitates voluntary exchanges with a NGO for up to one year.
- A free enquiry service to young people – typical questions are:
How to work or study abroad, questions on scholarships, possibilities for volunteering or exchanges, how to find contacts for activities abroad, where to find help to run a project, questions on studying, working, training, mobility, funding, and what is a youth exchange.
- All good questions – find out more yourselves from:
<http://www.eurodesk.org.uk/> and <http://www.europa.eu.int/youth>

Afternoon

National Training Fund – National Resource Centre for Vocational Guidance

- Back to our hosts office for the evaluation, debrief and final questions.
- Gosh, can't believe that's the week over or that we fitted all of that into just one week!

Summary of Key Points

- The Labour office Career counselling service is excellent – we could learn a lot from the way they handle their local labour market information. Can we get this kind of information from our Job Centres? There is fantastic integration between education and the world of work.
- The National centre for Vocational Education provides a fantastic research base for career guidance activities. The research base in the UK is being built up by Universities and others but this Centre is directly responsible to the Ministry of Labour and is funded by them. It shows real commitment on behalf of the Czech Government to the development of career guidance and vocational education/training.
- Career education is compulsory in compulsory education and beyond in upper secondary school
- Career guidance can get a bit mixed up with the other counselling services on offer. Psychological counselling seems to be a much stronger concept than career planning. We are lucky that Career Guidance has a relatively high profile in the UK and that it is a discrete service with specifically trained individuals.
- Adults in the Czech Republic looking for career guidance only really have the Labour Office. We are lucky in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to have an all age free service.

Conclusion

This was a brilliant experience. I am extremely grateful to Careers Europe, the European Commission Leonardo programme, Careers Scotland and, most importantly, our hosts in Prague for the opportunity to participate in this exchange. The other participants were fantastic and I feel that we really gelled as a group. I felt by the end of the exchange that I had known them for months rather than days! I hope that I have been able to share some of the things that I have learned throughout the week.

Useful websites

Czech Statistical Office	www.czao.cz (English version available)
National Training Fund	http://www.nvf.cz/onas/enindex.htm
Euroguidance	http://www.euroguidance.org.uk
Academia	http://www.ac-creteil.fr/steurop/
Guidenet	http://www.guidenet.org/ database of projects and guidance practices in other countries
Fit For Europe	www.fitforeurope.info informs you about education, study and careers in Europe. When completed in July 2005, the platform will offer information on 31 European countries in 9 languages.
Ploteus	http://europa.eu.int/ploteus Database of information on a range of European countries.
Estia	http://www.estia.educ.goteborg.se/ Source of information about education, professions and labour market in different European countries.
EURES	http://www.europa.eu.int/eures/home.jsp?lang=en
Eurodesk	http://www.eurodesk.org.uk/
Youth Information Centre	http://www.europa.eu.int/youth
For planning that trip	www.czech.cz and www.czechtourism.cz (both have English versions available)