

Careers Europe

European Guidance Exchange Programme Bucharest, Romania 9 – 13 May 2005

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Placement: Bucharest, Romania

This report gives an account of my week's work placement in Bucharest, Romania. This placement was organised by Careers Europe U.K in conjunction with The European Commission. Careers Europe based in Bradford is the UK National Resource Centre for International Careers Information and its mission is to promote mobility in Europe. It provides resources to careers services, connexions services and other information and advisory services throughout the UK. The aim of the placement is to give guidance to professionals within Europe and an overview of the ways that common issues have been dealt with across Europe.

For further information on guidance exchange opportunities visit:
www.careerseurope.co.uk.

List of Participants

France: Celine Chanfrau (CIO Toulouse); Aurelia Blenner (INETOP, Paris);
Dominique Conseil (CIO Lille); Francoise Engel (CIO Strasbourg);

Norway: Reider Johan Fredsvik (Job Centre Haugesund)

United Kingdom: Roger N Ondzie-Ahoue (London East Connexions Partnership);
Helen McEvansoneya (The Connexions Centre York)

Spain: Maria del Carmen Gonzalez Guerrero (Instituto de Educacion Secundaria,
Ciudad Ourense); Maria Jesus Diaz Zamorano (Instituto de Educacion Secundaria con
Coclos Formativos Vallaloid).

Romania – Country information

Romania is bordered on the north and northeast by Moldova, on the east by Ukraine, on the West by Hungary and Yugoslavia, and on the south by Bulgaria. In addition, there is 209 km of coastline, where it borders the Black Sea in the southeast.

The country is divided into six districts and regions: Transylvania, Bucovina, Moldova, Walchia, Banat, and Dobruja and has a population of 22,355,551 (July 2004), more than 55% of whom live in towns and cities.

Romania is the Eastern most representative of the Roman family languages and derives directly from Latin spoken in Dacia and Moesia in ancient times.

It is a multi-ethnic country made of: Romanians 89.5%, Hungarian 6.8%, Roma 1.8%, German 0.4%, Ukrainian 0.3%, Russians 0.2%, other 0.8% (Armenians, Turks, Slovaks, Tatars, and Croats). The official language is Romanian.

Religion plays an integral part in the lives of Romanians. In 1992, census figures claims that over 86.8% of the population belonged to the Orthodox Church. Roman Catholics and Protestants minorities, such as the Hungarian Reformed Church were well represented in Transylvania.

Romania has a republic type government. The Executive of Romania is as follows:

- President Traian Basescu (Head of State) since 20 December 2004,
- Prime minister Calin P Tariceanu (Head of Government) since 29 December 2004
- Council of ministries appointed by the prime minister.
- Legislative: Bicameral Parliament
- Judicial: Constitutional Court, Supreme Court, and lower court.

Climate: temperature-continental; ranges between hot summers and very cold winters, with lots of snow from mid December until the end of March. Romania average temperature is 11C (52F) in the south and on the coast, 2C (36F) on mountains.

The natural resources of Romania are: petroleum, timber, natural gas, iron, coal, iron ore, salt, arable land and hydro power.

Natural hazards: earthquakes most severe in south and southwest, and lands slides.

Romania has diplomatic and consular relations with 164 states and is a member of over 32 international treaties. Romania is EEC and EFTA associate member, and the 32nd Council of Europe member.

The Romanian Education and Guidance System

1935 – 1940 was a period when Careers guidance and counselling activities expanded in Romania. It became apparent that organisations and businesses required a restructure in terms of how they supported their workforce. In order to reach this objective, the enterprises set up within their structures Psycho-technical Institutes and Offices for Vocational Guidance in conjunction with the Labour Ministry. After World War II the interest decreased for two decades before catching up for the next two decades (1960 – 1980). The last period of regression lasted from 1980 till the 1989 Revolution.

In 1990 after the revolution, a group of Romanian scientists restarted the Institute for Educational Science (IES) previously closed in 1976. The Institute for Educational Science is affiliated to the Ministry of Education and Research. Its basic activity is financed by the public budget. As a national institute for research and development in education, IES aims to put forth the education policies and decisions by the scientific studies and data, to analyse needs and issues of the educational system in Romania, to participate on international research projects in the field of education. The IES is organized in five departments: Curriculum Development Department (CDD), Education Management Department (EMD), Evaluation Development (ED), Theory of Education Department (TED), Educational and Vocational Guidance Department (EVGD). The IEM ensures the methodological co-ordination of the national scot-counselling network involving Centres of Psycho-pedagogical Assistance.

The IES main research topics are the following:

- . Reform impact on school and society
- . Theoretical background of Education Reform
- . Innovation and Reform in the school System
- . Alternative education
- . Lifelong Education in an Open Society
- . Curriculum reform
- . Education management reform
- . Education improvement in rural areas: policies and strategies
- . Education and Minorities
- . E-learning and ICT in education
- . Vocational guidance

The IES has developed projects and partnership in co-operation with national and international institutions, such as: European Commission, UNICEF, IBE, IEA, Council of Europe, North-South Centre, OECD, World Bank, Open Society Institute, European Training Foundation, SIDREE, as well as the Romanian Ministry of Education, Research and Youth, National Curriculum Council, Local Authorities, Universities and Teacher Training Colleges, school inspectorate, non-governmental organizations etc. The IES is also part of Euroguidance network under the European Commission. Even though the IES is a government funded organisation, most of its funding for research work is provided from international organisations such as the European Commission and the World Bank.

During my time in Romania I visited various institutions such as Universities, Colleges, Primary Schools, Research Centres and it was a unique opportunity to share my knowledge and my professional experience with other participants and Romanian professionals. I have identified a number of strengths and weaknesses within the provision of guidance and support systems.

I was impressed by the professionalism and determination of professionals providing support to young people despite a lack of resources and support from the government. Some schools have developed important projects for young people entirely from fundraising activities and money collected from parents.

Despite all the efforts and enthusiasm from professionals, there are a number of gaps within the Romanian guidance and support system. Example: schools have no written child protection policy or equal opportunity policy. In Romania, counselling is not a statutory requirement and schools rely on their own fundraising activities to pay for careers guidance and counselling services. Therefore not all schools have access to career guidance and counselling services. There are very limited services for the special needs group and also little provision for the NEET group (Not in Education, Employment or Training). There is no tracking system in place to identify those not currently in the education system. Even though the government is aware of gaps within the current education system, these issues are still not high on its agenda.

There are similarities between the role of a Connexions Personal Adviser (PA) and the role of a Romanian counsellor. Like Connexions PAs, Romanian counsellors tackle young people's issues with a holistic approach. Romania's counsellors also provide a wide range of services (one to one support, group work, family mediation, personal issues, truancy etc) and work closely with teachers and tutors. In addition to the above responsibilities, Romanian counsellors also teach at schools and train teachers and staff in the area of guidance and counselling. All Romanian counsellors are postgraduates mainly in the following areas: psychology, pedagogy, Educational Science, Management and School Administration. In addition to their qualifications they also trained in career counselling, as well as school and community counselling.

Sunday 8/05/05

I landed at Bucharest international airport at about 14.30. My friend who lives in Bucharest was waiting for me. Hotel Comfort Suites is located in the city centre and offers a splendid view of Bucharest. After booking in, I went to a local restaurant and enjoyed the traditional Romanian cuisine. I have lived in Romania in the past, so I had no difficulties placing the order.

Monday 9/05/05

Morning

Visit to The Institute of Educational Science

Host participants:

Mihai Jigau - Director
Mihaela Nicoleta Chiru - Senior Researcher
Luminita Tasica - Senior Researcher III
Speranta Lavinia Cirlea - Junior Researcher
Angela Musca - Junior Researcher
Petre Feodorian Botnariuc - Junior Researcher

I took a taxi at 09.00 and arrived at The Institute for Educational Sciences at 09.30. This was my first meeting with all participants and it was the opportunity to introduce myself. After participants' introduction, our Romanian Colleagues gave a presentation which gave us an overview on the Romanian Education System and Guidance and Counselling Services in Romania. The presentation also covered the topics of the Institute of Educational Sciences.

The Education System in Romania

After the host presentation, participants were given 30 minutes to present their own backgrounds. My colleague from the Connexions Centre in York and I decided to do a joint presentation in which we introduced the Connexions Services (Connexions strategy, vision, ethos, policies, partnership, key principles, Personal Adviser role etc). This was the opportunity to compare, discuss and share knowledge and professional experience with all participants. Participants showed particular interest in Connexions Services and wanted to know more about Connexions. As well as answering questions we also handed out literature about Connexions.

The National Education System in Romania

| Age | Grade | ISCED | Educational Level | | Qualification level | Type |
|-----|-------|-------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|---|-----------------|
| 19 | | 6 | Post-University | | Higher education & Post-graduate | Post-Compulsory |
| | | 5 | University | | | |
| | | 4 | Post-High School | | Post High School education | |
| 18 | XIII | 3 | | High school - upper secondary | High School & Upper secondary education | Compulsory |
| 17 | XII | | High School - upper secondary | Completion Year | | |
| 16 | XI | | | | | |
| 15 | X | 2 | High School - lower secondary | Vocational School | Higher School & Lower secondary education | Compulsory |
| 14 | IX | | | | | |
| 13 | VIII | | Gymnasium | | | |
| 12 | VII | | | | | |
| 11 | VI | 1 | Primary School | | Primary School | |
| 10 | V | | | | | |
| 9 | IV | | | | | |
| 8 | III | | | | | |
| 7 | II | | | | | |
| 6 | I | 0 | Pre-School education | | Pre-School education | |
| 5 | | | | | | |
| 4 | | | | | | |
| 3 | | | | | | |

Afternoon

Visit to The Expert Centre

The Expert Centre provides the following services:

- Psychological Counselling
- Career Guidance Counselling
- Counselling for Professionals
- Training

The Expert Centre works in partnership with various institutions such as: The Child Protection Agency, voluntary organisations, international organisations etc. The Expert Centre runs programmes such as: health promotion; workshop on interview techniques and CV's, career guidance and orientation, placement centres for young people without parents, fostering and parents awareness workshops. However, due to lack of funding not all services are free.

Visit to Erastrau Park

After our visit to the Expert Centre we went to visit Bucharest's biggest and famous park. Erastrau Park is bigger than Hyde Park and was built by Ceausescu (Romanian ex president). There is a sad story behind the building of this park. Thousands of people were re-housed in order to build the park, which contains a splendid artificial lake, hotels, gardens and residences. It is one of the biggest recreational attractions in Bucharest. Our Romanian hosts suggested a tour of the lake by boat and we were able to enjoy the splendid views of the park.

After such a long day there was no better idea than going to the restaurant. We went to a traditional restaurant and enjoyed the Romanian cuisine.

Tuesday 10/05/05

Morning

Visit to Municipal Centre for Psychopedagogological Assistance

We met at the tube station (University Station) at 08.30 before going to the Municipal Centre for Psychopedagogological Assistance. We were invited in a classroom to observe a group counselling session with pupils aged between 10 and 11. Pupils were given a topic to concentrate on. The focus of the activity was around "self-esteem". We were then invited to another group counselling session involving pupils aged 14 and 15. The topic of the group session was about success, aspiration, goals and concentration. I was impressed with the counsellor's abilities to engage pupils. The

counselling session was followed by a presentation on the system of psychopedagogical assistance in Romania. Established in 1991, the Municipal Centre for Psychopedagogical Assistance (MCPA) co-ordinate 120 offices throughout the country and employ 128 counsellors. The centre works with parents, students and teachers and its objective is to promote education, inclusion and parent's participation. MCPA runs a range of activities such as: individual counselling, group counselling for students, teachers and parents, training for teachers, social assistance activities, and educational projects. MCPA work in partnership with many organisations such as: UNICEF, Save the Children, Start for Success, public organisations and NGO-s.

Afternoon

Visit to High School No 200

We were invited to our third counselling session of the day followed by discussions with pupils and teachers. I had been asked to explain the role of the Connexions Personal Adviser in schools. The role of Romanian counsellors in schools is similar to the role of a Connexions Personal Adviser. Romanian counsellors take a holistic approach when dealing with young people's issues.

Wednesday 11/06/05

Morning

Visit to the Academy of the Economic Studies: Marketing and Vocational Office

Set up in 1913, the Academy of the Economic Studies (AES) is the largest and the oldest economic studies University in Romania. In 2004-2005 AES has 40,000 students enrolled, out of whom 17,000 in distance learning, 2,078 doctoral students, 700 overseas students, 7,000 attending various post graduate courses, including Master's programmes. AES has 22 residences for students, accommodating 6000 students. The centre was established in 1998 as information and careers centre and became the marketing and careers guidance centre in 2002. The centre has two members of staff (1 psychologist and 1 economist) offering a wide range of support. Operating as a first point of help the centre offers counselling services for students, produces marketing literature for candidates, teachers, and parents and runs educational fairs at schools open days. The centre also offers one to one counselling on various issues (career, educational, emotional issues etc). Despite playing an important role the centre still hasn't got a juridical recognition or a recognised status.

Visit to the University of Bucharest: Vocational Information Guidance and Counselling Centre for students

The University of Bucharest is one of the leading institutions of high education in Romania, and enjoys a considerable national and international prestige. Among its graduates are many prominent personalities: teachers and researchers at important universities all over the world, members of the Romanian Academy, writers, politicians (member of the Romanian Parliament, ministers and president), diplomats etc.

The Vocational Guidance and Counselling Centre for students, which is located within the University was founded in 1997 and offers various services such as: information, guidance, one to one counselling, support with CV's, job search, training for work, training for labour market information, psychological testing for aptitude and ability, and information on studying overseas. The marketing team organise educational fairs and promote university courses. The centre targets students and postgraduates. We also visited the Erasmus office within the University. Erasmus is the Higher Education section of the European Union action program called "Socrates" in the field of education. It is an EU funded program that contains a wide range of measures designed to support the European Union activities of higher education institutions, including mobility and exchange of their students and teaching staff. The Erasmus Office offers assistance to EU students studying in Bucharest. For example: finding accommodation. The Erasmus programme has 95 overseas students. There are over 400 Romanian students on Erasmus programme overseas.

Afternoon

Visit to National College Mihai Viteazul

We had lunch at the student canteen at the University before going to our next visit. Mihai Viteazul College is recognised as a springboard for young teachers. It is one of the best schools in the country according to the statistics. Many respected University teachers in the country taught at Mihai Viteazul. The school has strong links with national and overseas institutions. This is a high achieving college with a very strict admission procedure. Students take an admission exam and the numbers of vacancies are limited. After the introduction of the school by the head teacher; we were invited to the school counsellor's office for further discussions.

The role of the school counsellor is very broad. The counsellor offers supports on issues such as: career guidance, emotional support, family mediation, social activities, group works, motivation, behavioural problems, learning difficulties, teenage pregnancy, discrimination and relationship breakdown. The counsellor also runs group-counselling sessions with parents. Even though most referrals come from teachers, students can refer themselves. The counsellor is a part of the college staff and has two additional responsibilities within the school: co-ordinate and train tutors.

Even though I was impressed with the college structures I have identified a number of weaknesses in terms of policies. For example: the school has no written equal

opportunity policy. Most of the time staff uses common sense to deal with sensitive issues such as child protection. However the college is working towards introducing policies.

Visits to the Village Museum

After the visits to the National College Mihai Viteazul we went to the Village Museum which is one of the main tourist attractions in Bucharest. The Village Museum gives an insight of the life in the ancient rural life in Romania.

We then went to a traditional Romanian restaurant for dinner.

Thursday 12/05/05

Morning

Visit to The National Agency for Employment: Career Guidance and Counselling Centre

The Romanian government is currently focused on joining the European Union (EU). As part of the government accession process, the National Employment Agency in conjunction with the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarities have put in place a series of changes in employment legislation in order to create the necessary institutional framework for the country's accession to the EU in 2007. The actions of training, re-training and guidance of labour in relation with the demand in the Labour market are part of the active measures series such as: optimisation of educational curricula, counselling, mediation and training. The Romanian New Labour Code has been hailed as a major step towards a modern and competitive labour market, in spite of the facts that there are still competitive gaps to be filled.

The Career Guidance and Counselling Centre was founded in 2000 and is part of The National Employment Agency. The centre has 5 counsellors, a co-ordinator, a labour market researcher and a counsellor for people with disabilities. One of its objectives is to promote employment law and social inclusion. The main tasks of centre's counsellors are: career counselling; collecting of labour market information; training for employment (for example: CV's, interview techniques and motivation letters); face to face and group counselling; guidance and general advice. The centre is also involved in various social activities. The centre has organised 32 job fairs since 1994, targeting ethnic minority groups, young graduates, long term unemployed and high school leavers. All job fairs are organised in conjunction with the Local Authorities and the Mayor of Bucharest. The centre has a database where client's information is recorded. School leavers and graduates are recorded in the job seekers database for 60 days. They become eligible to claim Job Seekers Allowance after that period if they are unable to find suitable employment.

Although one of the main objectives of the centre is to promote social inclusion and equal opportunity, there is limited support for those with disabilities in term of accessing employment. The centre offers services only to those able to work because employers are not keen to employ people with disabilities. However since 2000 the government has been taking measures to encourage employers to employ people with disabilities. The centre has a high turnover because more and more Romanians join private sectors or look for a second job. This is due to low salaries in public sectors.

Visit to Mark Twain International School

Mark Twain International School is a private school, located in the wealthy outskirts of Bucharest. This is an expensive private school not accessible for a middle class Romanian family. The teaching is in Romanian and English and although the majority of Pupils are Romanians, there are a number of pupils originally from foreign countries.

We were invited to observe a guidance session for 11 year olds. Pupils were given different topics to concentrate on, then to provide feed back. I was impressed with their creativity and the counsellor's ability to engage with pupils.

Afternoon

Visit to Technical College Dimitrie Leonida

After lunch at Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) we went to Technical College Dimitrie Leonida. As usual, we were greeted with a warm traditional Romanian welcome ceremony. Due to technical faults, the video conference we were supposed to have with the school counsellor who was in Portugal was cancelled. My colleague from Connexions York and I took the opportunity to introduce the Connexions Services and the role of Personal Advisers. We were then given a presentation on Romania.

In Romania 40% of young people attend technical college. Technical College Dimitrie Leonida offers both technical and academic programmes and has developed partnership with employers for students to gain work experience. The College has up to 600 students and 135 teachers and engineers.

We were given a tour of the College and visited the IT labs and workshops including: engineering, car body work and welding. Then we were invited for traditional Romanian food cooked by a member of staff.

We also visited a project linked to the College, teaching prosthetics. The project was founded by an ex-politician and rugby player. It offers accommodation for students who have recently left orphanages. It is a small but successful project providing valuable support to young people.

Friday 13/06/05

Morning

Visit to Special Needs School

Originally built as an asylum for the visually impaired, the school was refurbished in 1990 with the help of foreign aid. The school provides vocational, academic and post high school education. This is the largest school for visually impaired students (400 students). The school runs various courses such as: woodwork, furniture making, metal work, physiotherapy and massage. There are very limited work opportunities for these students because employers are reluctant to employ people with special needs. The school grants entry only to students who have finished 8th grade and who are either visually impaired or partially sighted, following a medical status and psychological assessment. Despite efforts to set up projects in the school, there are still very limited support services. For example: school doesn't offer career guidance and counselling support.

Institute of Educational Science

After the brief visit at the Special Needs School, participants met at the Institute of Educational Science for discussions and feedback. It was the opportunity to evaluate and reflect on the programme. Participants discussed the Romanian guidance and counselling system and highlighted its strengths and weaknesses as shown on the figure below.

| Strengths | Weaknesses |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Very good relationship between counsellors and students- Counsellors have strong status in schools and colleges. The work over 18 hours + 4 hours teaching within their allocated school or college- All professionals delivering guidance and counselling in schools and colleges are fully qualified (University and post graduate qualifications)- Methodical approach- Very enthusiastic and motivated professionals- Friendly workspace for counselling sessions- Positive attitude- Very little resource but high achievement | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Career guidance and counselling is not statutory in schools and colleges.- Little support from Local Authorities- Lack of policies in institutions. Professionals often use their common sense to deal with sensitive cases such as Child Protection.- Counsellors have no juridical status- Low wages force staff to look for second job- Lack of specialisation- Very little support services for the people with special needs and mental health. |

Conclusion

Taking part in the European guidance exchange programme in Romania was a unique development opportunity. The programme gave me an overview of the way common issues have been dealt with across Europe. It gave me the opportunity to reflect upon my own practice taking into account the advantages and disadvantages of both systems. I have also learnt different ways of working with young people.

I was particularly impressed with the enthusiasm and motivation shown by Romanian professionals. I have identified similarities between our roles. Both the Connexions Personal Advisers and the Romanian Counsellor provide a wide range of support to young people, taking a holistic approach.

Despite the gaps within the supporting young people network, it is important to recognise that since the revolution (1990), Romania has made huge progress. Another positive point is the Romanian's decision to join the European Union (EU). As part of the accession process, Romanians' institutions have begun major restructuring to improve decision-making and accountability. Top of the agenda is social inclusion, health, employment and education.

This programme enabled me to discuss and identify different ways of working with young people. I have learnt a lot from discussions with very dedicated professionals working with little resources but achieving great results, thanks to their dedication and enthusiasm. It was an opportunity to share knowledge and professional experience with colleagues from Romania, France, Spain and Norway. With the support of my colleague from The Connexions Service in York, we successfully promoted the Connexions Strategy and explained the impact of Connexions Services on young people. This visit gave me an overview of the way that common issues have been dealt with across Europe.