

ACADEMIA 2005

Norway 9th-13th May

Monday Day 1

Intro to Norway and facts about country, intro by others taking part

Monday was a day of trying to absorb information. It was based at the Directorate of Labour in Oslo. It started with a general introduction of the counsellors on the programme with a brief outline of what each of us was involved in. There were four representatives from the Czech Republic (3 from labour centre offices and 1 special needs teacher/adviser), two from Italy (middle school teachers), three from Spain (guidance counsellors based in offices), two from Greece (headteachers from technical/vocational high schools), two from Estonia (both from labour offices), 1 from France (psychologist based in office giving guidance) and two from England (1 adult adviser, 1 Personal Adviser).

The other sessions on the day were based around setting the scene in Norway. The role of Euroguidance Norway was covered. It's a government run department looking at labour market information and linked into special projects such as looking to help those with special needs back into the workplace and looking at programmes to help returners to work. It provides a link for guidance between education and employment and to maintain European links to formulate ways for the theory of lifelong guidance from the EU central perspective to be put into practice in Norway.

The current labour market trends were also discussed. Norway currently has an unemployment rate of about 4%. Manufacturing job losses have bottomed out and it is public service jobs that are being lost at the moment. As a general point, those with lower education results/fewer skills are the ones that are finding it harder to get work. The same problems that exist in this country seem to be evident in Norway. Norway is looking to "added value" as the way to create and maintain jobs in the economy.

We were given an introduction to the education system in Norway and a breakdown of the choices to be made in secondary education and at what age. Upper secondary schools cover both academic and vocational education so there is no equivalent of a further education college. While at high school, students have the opportunity to start apprenticeships without having to go through a separate organisation like the Training Provider in this country. There also seemed to be closer links between school and employers and the general impression was of a system that was a lot more intergrated for the transition phase from education to work.

While the system seemed good, there are still problems. There are those that become disengaged and do not graduate from high school and there is a drop out rate of around 20% who do not complete secondary education. Again, similar to the UK, it is most noticeable in the vocational courses that people do not finish the course. As with the UK, Norway is looking for ways to reach these people and try to re-engage them.

The last session of the day was a light hearted look at Norwegians and Norwegian culture. It was a very welcome wind down after a lot on information.

Tuesday Day 2

Vox (Norwegian Institute for Adult Education) Looking at validation of non-formal and informal learning – history, background, documentation and use.

This was effectively another “chalk and talk” day covering adult education and a look at recognising adult learning outside of formal qualifications. Adult education is the responsibility of the local councils to provide and it is in law that adults born prior to 1978 have a statutory right for upper secondary education on the basis of assessed non-formal and informal learning. Vox has been looking at methods to provide this assessment.

It carried out research with all interested parties (education, employers, government, voluntary sector) to bring together in the planning and management of the project. It was seen as having benefits in personal development, career development, certification of achievement, recognition for wage settlements and the shortening of the length of courses as prior experience and knowledge were recognised. It would also provide standard information that could be recognised on a national level. The procedure would involve an individual being given information and guidance, developing a portfolio of work, having an assessment and being given documentary proof of having achieved the necessary standard. Assessment would involve an interview with a specialist in the vocational area, vocational testing of skills and evidence produced in the portfolio of work.

Not only could it be used at an Adult Education Centre but also within the workplace so that employers could take it and see what skills their employees had and what training needs needed to be addressed. Employees would recognise the number of skills they have gathered which they may have taken for granted or not recognised.

Part of the documentation developed was a form which seemed similar to a “super” CV so that not only were basic qualifications and life history covered but it also went deeper to look at the type of skill, both vocational and social, that the individual had gained with examples. It seems to require a lot of self-analysis and would also need other help, perhaps from friends/work colleagues or a counsellor, to bring out all the skills/aptitudes that a person has. Again, this is so everything is identified and recognised as the individual might disregard something which others think is an important asset.

The principles behind this document are that it would be voluntary. It would be perceived as beneficial by the individual. It would be a source of proof owned by the individual and a description of actual experiences. It would be recognised and easy to use and would be in line with European developments on lifelong learning and its recognition by individuals and other bodies.

It was an early finish which again was very welcome as it was getting to be tough going by mid afternoon. Having travelled out by the underground to the Vox office,

we returned to Oslo and were given a sight seeing tour of Vigeland Park and its sculptures in the centre of Oslo..

Wednesday Day 3

Visit to Adult Education Centre at Follo looking at adult education

An early start again, as we took the train to visit the Adult Education Centre. We were given a briefing on the day to day work in Adult Education. The two counties of Oslo and Akershus have over a million inhabitants and covers over 20% of Norway's population. It also attracts the highest number of immigrants. The Adult Education centres provide citizenship classes to help new people to Norway to assimilate the culture and learn the language. Akershus Adult Education has a ratio of 4 women:1 man with the majority taking educational courses. A lot of the women are returners looking to join the job market and get qualifications they missed at school to get a better chance. The site of the centre is in the grounds of an upper secondary school. It is in the school that the adult learning centre is based with the computers but this is mainly used by school students. Not many of the adults take part in the school students lessons although this is available to them. We had an impromptu talk with the head teacher. One development is that they are looking to separate the guidance role so that there is a dedicated careers adviser alongside other counsellors. This is at a reverse of what has happened with Connexions.

Talk about the Directorate of Labour's competence recording version.

It was back to the centre of Oslo to the Directorate of Labour for the afternoon and a discussion on the recognition of voluntary activities. This was another programme undertaken to recognise skills and learning in voluntary activities or with voluntary organisations and to look at the accreditation of lifelong learning. It came across as a more comprehensive version of the document produced by VOX. This document was to be completed over the internet and the site gave a lot more help and information about how to fill the form in and explanations of what it was all for. The objectives were identical to that of the VOX project – to get an overview of one's own experience and skills, to be able to see other people's skills, to prepare for a job interview and to use as an extended CV, and to map the skills of employees in a firm.

Feedback had been received for this project. Most users had found it useful and had helped them in describing the range of skills they had. However, it was pointed out that there is a lot to read and it's a large piece of work. It was also said that it was difficult to describe the skills. It was certainly a very thorough document and completed well would be a very useful tool as a CV, for providing information and examples for an application form and for recognition of how much someone was able to do.

I could see the downside of both documents, the VOX and the Directorate of Labour, being the time and thoroughness to complete them initially and then the ongoing work in keeping them up to date. I could see the benefit that they could offer but they would be heavy going for most people.

Thursday Day 4

Visit to Lunner Products – sheltered workshop. Look at history, ethos, training and use of competency validation programme.

Thankfully, today was an easier going affair. We had an introduction and tour of the sheltered workshops. The staff had gone to a great deal of trouble to prepare for the visit and were delighted to be able to show off the work of the enterprise. While it did receive some subsidies, it was also expected to bring in money for itself. It had won both long and short term contracts for packaging, ran its own second hand shop and laundry, some warehouse work and recycling. We met people and were able to walk around and have a tour of the premises. The staff had used the VOX materials to do a mapping exercise of skills. The outcomes again were the same as the Directorate of Labour project. They had found it a useful exercise but it had been hard work to complete. It had highlighted things that were going to be taken forward into the next business plan and the intention was to keep individual “super CV’s” up to date.

Visit to Hadeland Glassworks – tour and look round.

The afternoon was taken up with a visit to a glassworks with a tour of the production area and a visit to the company museum.

Friday Day 5

Visit NOKUT - Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education. Look at HE system. Recognition of non-Norwegian qualifications.

This was a presentation on Norwegian higher education and focused on the recognition of overseas qualifications for entry to a Norwegian higher education institution. We were taken through the types of HE institutions and locations and taken through the steps of applying if outside of Norway. It was very dry and was difficult to take in on the last day.

However, one session looked at the Diploma Supplement which is a confirming document showing the subject studied, the content of course, the result and the HE institution studied at now issued to all Norwegian students that can be used throughout Europe as a quality control showing that a person has a recognised qualification. This seems to have foundered in the UK but it is perhaps some of the smaller European countries whose graduates are prepared to move to other countries for work that are taking this forward.

Wrap up and farewell at Directorate of Labour

A brief session of farewells and evaluation forms at the end of the week.

Conclusion

An interesting week, well prepared and organised by Euroguidance Norway. A good mix of countries were represented and those involved did have a good standard of

English. This made it possible for a lot of the technical information to come across. There was a nice mix of visits and presentations. I was tired by the end of the week as it does take a lot of concentration to take all on board even though the programme was in English. There was a lot covered in the first three days and it was lighter towards the end of the week. There was also time to have a look round Oslo and to see a couple of its tourist attractions.

It did bring home to me the European dimension and how decisions about guidance in Brussels are having an effect on how services are provided here.