

Report on an Exchange Visit to Luxembourg – May 2006

This was organised by the European Community Exchange Programme (Academia). The local participating body is Careers Europe (part of Careers Bradford) and the exchange project is funded by the EEC under their Leonardo programme.

Luxembourg

Luxembourg has a population of 450,000 and is a country roughly the same size as Derbyshire. It is similar to the UK in that it still has a monarchy operating within a parliamentary democracy. The monarchy, however, seems to have a lower profile than in the UK. Luxembourg has a very large immigrant population (approx.38%) and is officially tri-lingual (Luxembourgish, French and German).

33% of the workforce cross the border to work in Luxembourg either on a daily basis or are foreign nationals residing in the country. 80% of the workforce work in the civil service or similar institutions (EEC/foreign banks.) Over half the people 'coming in' to work are French. Luxembourg is an affluent country – a major source of employment is banking and finance (the banking system operates a total secrecy policy!) There are approx 190 banking institutions and nearly 100 insurance companies based in Luxembourg city. Residents enjoy the highest level of GNP per capita of any EU country.

Education system

Local councils are responsible for the management of secondary schools and although teachers are paid by the state the councils recruit teaching staff. Standardised tests are done by teachers in Primary schools along with psychometric tests (can be administered by the school psychologists) – this is to decide which stream pupils will enter at secondary level.

The psychologist will start to work with pupils in the last two years of primary education (age 10/11) on a group and an individual basis. A Guidance Board, which includes the psychologist, will take the test results into consideration with school performance to decide on streaming levels in secondary schools. Parents and pupils are able to appeal against the decision.

The 'classic' stream is itself divided into various sections. Maths is the most prestigious section followed by Literature. The weakest section is 'sciences économiques and sociales'. Latin is also recommended to the most able students – if you start Latin early you will start English later. Many universities in Switzerland and Germany are now using Latin as a selection tool.

The Luxembourg system is very selective. At 12 years pupils go into :

Classic - go on to complete the Luxembourg Baccalaureat - A/L equivalent -35% go into this stream nationally

Technical – this is divided into sub streams according to interest and capability – 50% in this stream nationally

Preparatory – appears to be an ‘entry’ type level largely for those who are having difficulty mastering the three official languages – 15% in this stream.

Of the 36% of children of foreign origin entering Secondary education:-

13% are placed in Classic: 37% in Technical: 60% in Preparatory (often due to language barriers.)

Unless one is a linguist very difficult to obtain a professional job – works to the disadvantage of immigrant children many of whom are of Portuguese descent.

Within the Classic stream only 50% of students go through without failing once (ie. having to repeat a year). Technical stream – 40% will repeat a year. Almost impossible to change streams - reason given was that ‘classical’ education is delivered at a much faster pace, more abstract and has a greater focus on languages hence pupils moving up from the Technical stream will find it very hard to cope with. It has to be said that the Luxembourg system is good for motivated, bright pupils but not so good for lower achievers – although most young people eventually manage to work out how to negotiate the system to their best advantage (according to Jean-Jaques.)

Some of the older schools in Luxembourg are just ‘classique’ and some are just ‘technique’. The Preparatory streams are placed within the Technical schools. Some people argue that all children should be educated together – but not happened yet. Children are legally obliged to attend school for 9 years from the age of 6 to 15. Average class sizes are smaller than in the UK. Average class size in Primary is 14; Secondary classique is 22 and never over 28 and there are an average of 12 students in the workshops within school (technical stream.)

Worth noting that pupils are taught in Luxembourgish for first 2 years (aged 4-6) and at 6 start to learn German. At 7 they start French. Once in Secondary they learn English. Most lessons in Secondary (Classic) stream are taught in either French or German. German is a big problem for ‘French’ students and French a problem for Luxembourgish students. The Luxembourg language is far closer to German than French – German T.V and Newspapers are more popular than their French equivalents.

Guidance systems in Luxembourg

In schools guidance is delivered by qualified psychologists (must have a degree in psychology) – focus appeared to be on educational rather than careers guidance. More emphasis on psychometric testing – this formed part of the decision making process at 12 years ie. to stream pupils.

The Luxembourg host for this programme was the head of a guidance team based in a secondary school in Esch-sur Alzette (a small town just outside Luxembourg city.) His team is made up of an educational psychologist, a social worker, an educateur/trice (learning support role) and several teachers with an interest in guidance (one of whom must be a Special Needs teacher.). Responsibility for educational and psychological guidance lies within the Ministry of Education – the school based teams are part of the Service de psychologie et d’orientation scolaire (SPOS teams.)

No professional training for careers guidance as in UK.

List of visits made

The first three days we were based at the secondary school in Mersch where the host worked. Jean-Jacques Ruppert (our host) is employed by the CPOS: this is the schools' Psychological and Orientation Service. Colleagues doing the same job as Jean-Jacques within schools are trained psychologists rather than guidance counsellors - he is the only one who has a guidance qualification. CPOS workers give 'psychological' guidance rather than careers advice. Jean-Jacques will see each parent and student at Mersch School once every term automatically, but otherwise students self-refer. Students can bring any issue (abortion advice/sexual abuse) to the SPOS worker. The small teams operating within the schools are called the SPOS teams. Some SPOS professionals are based in the city centre but most are based in schools. The CPOS Service comes under the Ministry of Education.

SPOS teams contain one psychologist, a social worker, a support worker (educateur/educatrice) and several guidance teachers. The Guidance Teacher is allocated some time to work with students, to arrange work experience and help with job search skills - the role seems to resemble to some extent that of the Careers Teacher in the British system. One of the SPOS team should be available in school to see students between 8.00am - 5.00pm every school day.

On the first day the 8th May we met two staff working for the **ALJ (Action Locale pour Jeune)**. The 'educatrice' seemed to me to approximate most closely to the generic PA role in Connexions - not based in school but coming in to school often and also doing home visits. She was accompanied by a Teacher from the school in Mersch who had a particular interest in supporting students with social/familial problems.

The following day (9th May) we visited the **National Centre for Continuous Vocational Training** - 400 young people (age range 16-22) on two year vocational courses - workshops offering training in electrical/joinery/engineering etc Vocational training also offered in schools - F.E colleges don't appear to exist. Mainly recruit from students progressing from lowest secondary stream - the preparatory. Many of these students fail to find work in their chosen trade because they do not gain the diploma level qualification (too weak academically) which employers are looking for.

On Wednesday the 10th May we visited the **Lycee Classique** in Dickiersch and spoke to the Head Teacher - Jean Bohnet. Mr Bohnet manages three 'classique' school sites - two in Diekirsch and the school in Mersch where we were based. There are 120 students in their final year (equivalent to our Year 13) of whom 80 progress to university.

On Thursday 11th May we visited the **Centre for Employment** (ADEM - Administration de L'Emploi). This agency provides help to place people into employment and training.

The aim is to provide vocational guidance to enable applicants to access the labour market. Counselling is used as part of the guidance process. Also deliver a careers education programme in schools. However this is not a Job Centre and it doesn't hand out money or benefits to those who are unemployed. In Luxembourg you can only claim benefits after the age of 26 unless you are over 18 and a single parent with a child. Last year the Centre placed 468 adults and 1013 young people into Modern Apprenticeships.

Much of the theory needed to complete these vocational qualifications has to be done at school for example optician (technician level) or dental technician training. There has been an increase in unemployment recently in Luxembourg. ADEM is also the central point for all adults seeking Apprenticeships – they must pass through this organization in order to be referred for adult training.

Secondary school students from the Technical stream are obliged to visit this Centre so that they can make a more informed choice re what type of career/job they want to pursue post 16. Ideally school pupils will find their own training placement but ADEM writes to all local firms every year as legally each firm must take on an apprentice from time to time. There is no obligation for a company to employ you just because they took you on as a Mod. App.

On Thursday 11th May we also visited the **CPOS centre** – supports the SPOS teams operating in schools and provides a central resource centre (similar to Star House?). However guidance offered to those who self refer is based on a psychotherapeutic model although staff working here do not necessarily have a qualification in psychotherapy. Above all this is an administrative centre for the SPOS teams throughout Luxembourg. If students from Mersch school visit this centre Jean-Jaques would be told by the worker at the Central Office (CPOS). Although this begs the question – has the student visited the Central Office because they wanted the anonymity of talking to someone not associated with the school ?

On Friday 12th May we went to a **Kindergarten and a Primary school** in Bertrange.

We were shown round by the Deputy Mayor representing the local council in Bertrange which is responsible for the efficient running of these schools. The average class size in the Kindergarten was 16 pupils. Prior to the Kindergarten there is a Precoce school – this is for children of 3 years and upwards. Precoce education provides an opportunity for foreign nationals to learn Luxembourgish, it is not compulsory but 75% of parents take up the offer of a place for their sons or daughters. Following on from Precoce is the Kindergarten - all children must attend this.

In the first year of the Primary school (follows on from Kindergarten) children start to learn German and there are support classes for those needing extra German and extra Luxembourgish. Pupils with special needs will be taken out from the more academic subjects and given extra support.

All classes in Precoce, Kindergarten and Primary will have a Teacher and an Educateur (support role) both working with the children.

Friday 12th May - visit to the **Centre for Higher Education** – very important as only post-grad. courses offered at Luxembourg university. Virtually all students study abroad although able to train in Luxembourg now to become a Primary Teacher. This Centre houses information on H.E and student finance and they give advice and help on careers and Higher Education opportunities in Luxembourg and abroad. This is also the body that awards loans for university study - all means tested. They have to accumulate a lot of information on studying abroad – in the UK, Canada, USA, Portugal, Italy, France, Germany etc

Most students will return to Luxembourg after studying abroad but obviously this will depend on job opportunities available in Luxembourg.

The Centre sees up to 30 people a day after the BAC results are published. At other times of the year they average 6 visitors a day.

Summary

- Luxembourg has a very selective and complex education system. Guidance is delivered in a directive rather than an exploratory or person-centred way.
- The schools and other facilities that we visited were of a very high standard ie well equipped and maintained
- There is a psychological bias in the delivery of guidance which appears to neglect the social and familial context of students. Psychotherapy is increasingly seen as important to the guidance process – although this is being resisted by the psychologists currently working within the SPOS teams in schools.
- Interesting and enjoyable visit. Made me appreciate the greater flexibility of the English system (more inclusive.) Also very interesting to meet other participants – 2 from Ireland, 2 from Spain, 2 from France and 1 from Scotland.
- Education appeared to be more valued within the Luxembourg culture than in our own. Luxembourg seemed to be a fairly conservative society – I would imagine quite difficult for young people to ‘rebel’.
- Since my return I have publicised the Exchange programme widely within Sheffield Futures and several of my colleagues have expressed a strong interest in participating. Many colleagues told me they ‘missed’ the original e-mail asking for applications. I would be happy to pass on information to colleagues if you think that would be helpful.

Evelyn Risner

30/05/06

