

ACADEMIA 2006 IN LUXEMBOURG

GUIDANCE EXCHANGE PROGRAMME

8TH - 12TH MAY

This comprised a multi-national group of eight guidance practitioners from across the European Union, including two from UK (Careers Scotland & Connexions, Sheffield) along with two respectively from Ireland, Spain and France, including one far travelled representative from Reunion Island in the Indian ocean! Presentations and programme delivery was bi-lingual in French and English.

LUXEMBOURG PLACEMENT

The placement focussed on an introduction to the Luxembourg education and guidance system, with an opportunity to consider “good” communication in educational and vocational guidance, and to deliberate on “does guidance really matter?” Insight into measures to promote professional and social inclusion also featured.

PLACEMENT OBJECTIVES

This offered the opportunity to gain a different perspective on educational and guidance provision in Luxembourg, and the significance of guidance in a wider context. Of particular interest was the impact of social inclusion measures in personal, social and economic terms. The programme offered a unique overview of the ways that common issues are dealt with across Europe, and the importance of the European dimension within guidance. Careers Scotland is recognised as a leading player in the international arena, and forging links is an important aspect of this and supportive of Highlands & Islands Enterprise’s Global Connections agenda.

BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

The Grand Duchy of Luxembourg describes itself as sitting at the cross-roads of Europe – in many different senses- and is a land-locked state, covering 2,586 square kilometres (about half the area of Ross-shire), and bordered by France, Belgium and Germany. It is a constitutional monarchy with the Grand Duke as Head of State and a parliamentary democracy with currently a coalition government. The administrative structure consists of 3 districts, 12 cantons and 118 town council areas. There are two main cities – the capital Luxembourg and Esch-sur-Alzette. The latter was the base for the programme. It is a multi-lingual society with three main languages of Luxembourgish, French and German.

The population of Luxembourg stands at 455,000, very near to the figure for the Highlands and Islands of 460,540 (Highlands & Islands Enterprise May 2006). This constitutes a doubling within a century. Significantly, 39% of the population are non-nationals, embracing 150 other nationalities, particularly Portuguese, Italian, French, Belgian, and German. In terms of demographics, it is an ageing population with a simultaneous decrease in the under-15's. 67% of the workforce are foreigners with notable features in recent years of an increase in cross border workers (over half are French) and a rise in female employment. 80% of Luxembourgers work in public services. Unemployment stands at 4.2%.

Early economic growth revolved around iron ore mining, coal, steel and railways with a gradual decline in agricultural component, though still noted for its wine production and forestry. Luxembourg is now a considerable and expanding financial centre with over 170 banking institutions and around 100 insurance companies. There is also a developing service industry incorporating telecommunications and audio-visual activities.

Cultural policies and projects are aimed at promoting social cohesion, acknowledging the diverse nature of Luxembourg's multi-cultural society. Luxembourg City is home to many iconic new buildings by international architects created for the banking, cultural, education and sports sectors.

THE PROGRAMME

DAYS 1-3

These were based around the secondary school in the town of Mersch, in the Lycee Classique/Technique Annexe de Mersch in central Luxembourg, to offer opportunity for information on education and guidance services and pupil support systems, and interspersed with visits,

This school is of the main bases of our host and programme leader who is a psychologist with the **Centre de Psychologie et D'Orientation Scolaires (CPOS)**. This comes under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education with professional staff sworn in by Minister which constitutes a job for life, and classified as a civil servant. Some 6 or 7 years ago differing strands of guidance were split up into their separate 4 silos – educational(CPOS / SPOS), social inclusion(ALJ), vocational(ADEM), and HE (CEDIES) - and where once this was a unified provision, practitioners can now only work within their own remit which can make guidance, at times, “ a bit tricky”. There was also reference to the OECD analysis of educational and guidance policies in Luxembourg. Website:www.cpos.lu

Each secondary school has a support team for pupils and parents, comprising psychologist, guidance teachers, a social worker, and an educator or educational worker. This seems to be a generous set-up with support spanning generic education & guidance, including careers dimension

(psychologist), learning support (educator), guidance teacher (narrower remit revolving around specific items e.g. work experience). Most guidance counsellors have psychology backgrounds but no formal guidance qualification.

There is on-going voluntary self-referral, however at the end of each term there is an assessment by school of needs and issues of every pupil with parents contacted and invited to consult. Parents evenings are accorded high priority with at least one parents evening per term. Informal contact throughout term for pupils and parents also encouraged and valued. Guidance appears to be fairly directive.

Secondary School System

This is very stratified and selective at age 11/12 years with standardised tests in later primary school to identify transition pathways and streams. These tests usually confirm school performance and identify progression. At times there can be discrepancies between school performance and test results but usually there are recognisable causes such as social issues. CPOS has a significant locus in this process, working with pupils in last two years of primary. Tests incorporate language, perception, visual, motor, numeracy and auto-memory skills. The Cattell-Weiss intelligence test is also utilised, once before Xmas and once again after. This looks at attitude and motivation, organisation, autonomy, and work with stress. Educational tests are obligatory but others optional with parental agreement. The system is highly selective with language barriers a major problem. Linguistic skills across 3 languages are essential from an early age. There are 3 main streams:-
Classic: A-level stream and main route to HE/University. 35% of pupils nationally (13% non-nationals)

Technical: Different routes within this, leading to specific qualifications and job progression. 50% of pupils nationally (37% non-nationals)

Preparatory: Basic entry level of compulsory secondary education with possible progression routes to technical streams. 15% of pupils nationally (60% non-nationals)

There is the view that this is a good system for the “bright”, middle ability pupils will find their way but lower ability can experience difficulties with system. Rigidity can mean that it is easy to go down but more difficult to climb up e.g. from Technical to Classic. The curriculum of the latter is more theoretical with strong languages focus. There can be pressure from parents to re-sit latter years of primary school (levels 5 & 6) but this generally viewed as pointless.

The school at Mersch is a component part of larger split campus across 3 sites, with companion schools in town of Diekirch. The Annexe has 450 pupils across the 3 streams from ages 12-15 years. This includes 30 girl boarders with other issues to address. Diekirch is home to Classic/Technical school with 720 pupils from 16+, and further separate Technical school, a total of 2000 pupils overall under one director with a staff of 250. Website: www.lcd.lu

There are 11 years of compulsory schooling in Luxembourg from pre-school (age 4) through primary to secondary with the school day from 8.00 am – 2.00 pm. There is an earlier pre-school option at age 3 years which is not obligatory but offers opportunity to learn Luxembourgish, but in a fun way. Every town council must offer this provision. At age 6, pupils transfer to primary with introduction to German in first year and addition of French in 2nd year. If pupil experiences language difficulties at this early stage then some consolidation work is done before introduction of 2nd language. The leaving age is 15 years by 1st September. Teachers work on average 17 hours per week in school and only come in for classes. The town councils manage teachers and pay for buildings, with the schools visited of an extremely impressive standard in terms of both resources and aesthetics. The extensive wood-panelled office, complete with objets d'art and elegant furniture, of the director of the Diekirch classic school would not have been out of place in a global organisation!

DAY 1 - Action Locale Pour Jeunes (ALJ)

This is a support agency, with social inclusion remit, for young people in the 14-26 years category offering assistance towards employment and resolution of other issues, including housing, stability issues etc. Young people can be referred from school, appear at information centres, or come through work route, or via social workers. There is a network of offices all over the country re-inforcing the *locale* element. Staff, who may have an education or social work background, offer time and space for listening, home visits as appropriate, all with a view to understanding how the person lives. As there are no state benefits until 26 years+, young people are dependant on family, and if this relationship breaks down then survival can be very difficult, with external support required. An instance was given of young couple with baby who were evicted from family home (baby remained), becoming homeless and requiring accommodation to help towards independent living. For example, there are facilities in hostels with attached work. There is no financial provision for this age group and no FE colleges to progress education. This can be particularly problematic for young people who do not attain the full qualifications at school (CATP & CCM) as platform to apprenticeships across spectrum of jobs. *Action Locale* works with other agencies as appropriate and also receives background education and social work information as relevant.

DAY 2 - NATIONAL CENTRE FOR CONTINUOUS VOCATIONAL EDUCATION (*Centre National de la Formation Professionnelle Continue*)

This is a vocational training centre for young people on two year courses in trades such as construction, electrical, motor vehicle, hairdressing who have moved from Preparatory stream in school. Along with vocational training there are modules in French, German and Maths and Social Education to aid progression on to Technical regime and apprenticeship route. Again importance of languages underlined.

DAY 3 -GUIDANCE THEORY & DISCUSSION

There was reference to the origins of the Applied Vocational Psychology & Policy Research Unit with founding membership comprising Belgium, Canada, Germany, Lithuania, Luxembourg, and Poland. The objectives include the development of studies; the scientific accompaniment of similar studies; external evaluation of studies; and the development and promotion of transitional networks. *Does Guidance Matter?* Guidance can become a scapegoat for individuals' and society's failings. There is the view that there is always an element of muddling through within rational decision-making.

SPOS (*Service de Psychologie et D'orientation Scolaire*), allied to CPOS, noted in surveys of their client group, that girls are happier than boys, parents are pro SPOS, and family influence on classic students particularly significant. Surveys involving pupils, parents and teachers on '*Why Children Fail*' revealed, with variable responses, that with students, reasons identified included not listening to advice, not working hard enough and failing to have the right attitude. The system was reproached for teacher incompetence, and guidance was considered to either be too late, or providing wrong information or wrong evaluation. Discussion progressed to consider the possible tensions between person-centred approach revolving around goals and transferable skills to more prescriptive method acknowledging dictates of job market and specific qualifications. There was also reference to the OECD study on Luxembourg. Website: www.oecd.org/edu/careersguidance

DAY 4 – ADMINISTRATION de L'EMPLOI (ADEM)

This is situated near the main station in Luxembourg City to support access for all clients. Their function is to provide vocational guidance for the labour market, providing information, guidance, and placing. They deliver careers education in some schools with individuals or groups in the Preparatory stream in the 12 - 15 years age range, drawing on a number of visual resources e.g. construction posters to identify different jobs and promoting teamwork, to worksheets on e.g. making a hamburger to find all the jobs around this. Progression with young people takes them on to activities identifying, qualities, skills and competencies. With latter, 3 levels are itemised: intellectual/academic; physical/health; and social. Some of these initiatives started off as EU project with uptake desired now by most schools. Every pupil is issued with leaflets on apprenticeships on offer and what to do next. To assist placing, ADEM writes to all employers, requiring them to state whether they can offer an apprenticeship, as it is compulsory for employers to notify apprenticeships in advance. Young people must also engage with ADEM in seeking apprenticeships, but can also bring along opening of own if they have contacts.

In 2000, ADEM started to deal with adults, averaging over 1000 per year, but this can create competition for apprenticeships. Adults attract the minimum wage, however employers are re-imbursed by government for difference in amount to equalise situation with young people. An employer has no obligation to employ beyond the 3 years apprenticeship, and receives subsidies and tax breaks. The unemployed are not obliged to come to ADEM but most do so. Apprenticeships are also open to adults outwith Luxembourg. Most recent figures show 468 young people and 1013 adults

placed. Young people are paid via the Ministry of Education and adults, the Ministry of Employment. Young people remain initially within the school system (no colleges) for the theoretical aspect of apprenticeship with classes in the afternoon, and most of these conducted in German. It is possible, on completion of one apprenticeship, to access 2nd opportunity if initial route not suitable or ultimately acceptable. Once again, competency in languages determines everything. ADEM highlighted difficulties with young people not prepared enough for work or holding inappropriate expectations.

DAY 5 – VISIT TO PRE-SCHOOL AND PRIMARY FACILITIES, BERTRANGE.

There was an opportunity to speak to town council representatives (and share their generous hospitality!) prior to visit to school complex. Bertrange is a town of 6,000 inhabitants dealing with 600 school pupils who are placed, as is the norm, in school building appropriate to requirements e.g. senior secondary, learning Luxembourgish etc. Bertrange is also home to a number of different nationalities, especially Portuguese, French and Italian. Common denominator is addressing language needs.

First step Pre-school provision (age 3) is aimed at teaching Luxembourgish, and while not obligatory, it has take-up record of 75%. It was emphasised that this is not a creche, and has 4 classes plus one teacher, one educator and teaching assistants.

Pupils progress on to compulsory further two years of Pre-school or Kindergarten where they are taught by graduate educators who have completed the Baccalaureate, plus two years training. In local Kindergarten there are 8 classes with, on average, 16/17 pupils, and one teacher per class. Pre-school and Kindergarten teachers have partial education background but need additional training to be a Primary teacher. There is also a teacher who specialises in teaching Luxembourgish to Kindergarten pupils, to help them catch up as need be. The 1st and 2nd year Kindergarten pupils are mixed in classes and the structure of their day is every morning 8.00-12.00 Monday – Friday plus 3 afternoons per week from 2.00 – 4.00.

Primary schools are divided up into different year groups e.g. 1st and 2nd years in one building, the remainder elsewhere. In school visited there were four 1st year and four 2nd year classes, each with a teacher, and special needs teacher. Additionally there was a support class in languages – Luxembourgish and German, and a “catching-up” class for pupils with severe learning difficulties. There is also the facility for parents to leave their children in school from 7.30 in the morning and pick them up to 5.30pm for small charge. Meals are served in canteen under supervision and table service.

VIST TO CENTRE de DOCUMENTATION et D'INFORMATION SUR L'ENSEIGNEMENT SUPERIEUR (CEDIES)

This is the centre which deals with higher Education and post secondary options, providing careers information and support for HE studies in Luxembourg and abroad. There is a very limited range of courses and

options within Luxembourg itself with only one University which mainly offers post-graduate courses and some diploma level courses e.g. Teaching. As a consequence nearly all Luxembourg undergraduates study abroad. The centre is a key information source on options and funding support as well as offering advice and guidance. It is essential, therefore, that they keep abreast of developments and change. They hold prospectuses/ information on HE institutions world-wide, and publish comprehensive study guides by country e.g. HE in the UK. They deal with approximately 30 clients per day after Bacalureate. Approximately 25% of school pupils progress to University, with the majority going to neighbouring countries but also world-wide. France is popular for Law degrees, with Germany attracting Engineering students. Many students will choose to return to Luxembourg on graduation but this may depend on discipline and labour market

There are two funding strands: Scholarship and Loan. The former is primarily based on need and social criteria factors but everyone is entitled to apply for a bank loan at 2% interest from the Luxembourg government which is means-tested. Application for funding requires individual to hold Luxembourg Bacalureate or equivalent, meet residency criteria and have place at recognised HE institution. The loan can be paid back over 10/12 years with some graduates deferring re-payment until financial situation and circumstances more favourable. Website: www.cedies.lu

CONCLUSION

This was a very positive experience which widened horizons, encouraged a fresh perspective and cultivated a potential network of international contacts. Insight to differences in structures and delivery in education and guidance services were interesting in themselves but also offered a prism through which similar services at home could be appraised. The social dimension was equally valuable and stimulating, with some opportunity also to sample the culinary and visual attractions of Luxembourg as a country.

OBSERVATIONS

- ❖ In comparison to Highlands of Scotland, Luxembourg is small in area but much higher density of population.
- ❖ The international dimension in population, workforce and employment is significant, partly due to geographical location.
- ❖ There is resonance for Scotland and the Highlands in terms of population demographics with ageing indigenous population and emphasis on retention of youth population as well as outward focus in attracting new talent from overseas.
- ❖ Educational resources in terms of buildings and facilities are excellent with generous staff:pupil ratios. Funding does not seem to be an issue.
- ❖ School population is housed according to age/need e.g. both primary and secondary pupils can be in different buildings over extensive school campus, not all in one school.
- ❖ The education system is very selective with streaming at an early age, lacking flexibility and not conducive to upper mobility. It may also give rise to family angst. This contrasts directly with Scottish system,

- ❖ Generic pupil support in school is well resourced and comprehensive. In Scotland, support would fall to guidance teachers with reference on to other professionals/agencies as appropriate.
- ❖ Career guidance delivered by psychologists and is more directive and part of wider education focus given streamed school system. Careers Scotland's focus is on Career Planning and career resilience which is more person-centred, working in partnership with client.
- ❖ Services also very fragmented for small country, highlighting disadvantages which are not present in all-age service as in operation in Scotland.
- ❖ There is extensive and widespread use of psychometric testing which is not a feature in Scotland where blanket use would not sit comfortably within education ethos.
- ❖ No guidance qualifications as such in Luxembourg, giving rise to question of whether practitioners need some kind of theoretical basis, which is currently being deliberated by Careers Scotland in Highlands, and review of qualifications.
- ❖ Wide availability of apprenticeships with structured notification and referral procedures which makes system and access easier and more transparent. Option of further training/apprenticeship also gives degree of flexibility. However early leavers with basis school qualifications (2 year course as opposed to 3 year) can struggle to secure an opportunity. Stratified school system impacts on job opportunities. Modern apprenticeships harder to locate in Scotland though applicant interest evident but not always matched by opportunities. It may be worth giving some consideration to Luxembourg apprenticeship vacancy system or variation of this.
- ❖ Ability in **languages the key** to both educational and employment progress and impacts on whole way of life.
- ❖ Lack of language skills, notably French & German, could also be a significant obstacle to UK nationals seeking work in Luxembourg. However Scottish graduates, with language skills, have advantage of 4 year degree which is sought in graduate recruitment in Luxembourg.
- ❖ Parental influence into early adulthood, not at least in financial terms, also noteworthy.

