

**GUIDANCE EXCHANGE-ICELAND MARCH 27th –31st 2006**  
**SPONSORED BY CAREERS EUROPE AND LEONARDO**  
**Jane Walker Coventry\Warwickshire Next Step**  
**DAY 1**

## **INTRODUCTIONS**

A total of 15 delegates were welcomed to the Academia course in Iceland by Jonina Kardal, Chair of the Icelandic Association of Careers Counsellors.

8 countries were represented-

Norway

Ireland

France

Denmark

United Kingdom

Spain

Sweden

Finland

The profession of Careers Counsellor in Iceland is only 25 years old, and is becoming actively involved in promoting it's work to Parliament.

Our host for the week – Bjarni Kristjansson-introduced his work as manager of Euroguidance Iceland. The Research Liaison Institute based at the University of Iceland is sponsored by the Leonardo Agency plus other European organisations, to coordinate research into the Labour Market.

## **COUNTRIES PRESENTATIONS**

Each country represented gave a presentation outlining the education and guidance systems in their country.

### **DENMARK**

**YOUNG PEOPLE** are seen in school from the ages of 12-16. Similarly to Connexions, more emphasis is placed on those with unclear goals, and showing signs of disaffection. Youth Guidance Centres also provide help to young people up to the age of 25

**ADULTS** are seen in Job Centres. Unemployment is less than 5%  
Employment Insurance can be claimed if unemployed, up to 55% of a salary, but only if a realistic CV is produced, which advisers assist with.

Regular checks are made on job applications

Clients can "sign on" via the internet.

If under 25, can only claim insurance for up to 16 months. If remain unemployed, have to attend compulsory education/vocational training.

Danish counselling is based on Canadian/Swedish traditions.

## SWEDEN

Compulsory education is from 7-16. From 16-19, a range of 17 national programmes are available, a mixture of academic and vocational courses. Although not compulsory, approximately 98% attend.

Guidance is offered in a range of settings-Schools (often by teachers with some careers training), local information centres and Job Centres.

## NORWAY

Norway was represented by 2 EURES Advisers.

A brief explanation was given of AETAT (the Norwegian Public Employment Service), which provides services to jobseekers (including the opportunity to return to education if required) and services to employers.

AETAT'S priority groups are-

- Immigrants
- Youth
- Long term unemployed
- The "occupationally disadvantaged"

EURES (European Employment Services) is a cooperation network designed to facilitate the free movement of workers within the European Economic areas.

Main objectives are-

- To provide advice and guidance to potentially mobile workers on job opportunities, as well as living and working conditions in the European Economic Area
- To assist employers wishing to recruit workers from other countries

## VISIT TO HITT HUSID

The group visited Hitt Husid, a youth centre in the city centre of Reykjavik. The name means "The other or alternative House" and is a cultural & information centre for young people aged 16-25.

Objectives are-

- To give young people a place to work on their ideas and assisting them in achieving these.
- A reflection of youth culture
- To offer counselling and information to young people in cooperation with a range of professionals & organisations
- Provide advice on summer work in Iceland and overseas

Although similar to a Connexions One Stop Shop from the advice and guidance standpoint, it also offered a wide range of facilities for young people to become involved in cultural activities. This included-

- Rooms for young people to meet in groups
- An Art Gallery where young people can apply to display their work
- An arts workshop
- A concert/theatre hall
- Design and publishing facilities
- Video production facilities

Young people are encouraged to participate in a range of cultural activities e.g. street theatre, arts festivals, and an annual "Battle of the Bands".

The centre's counselling team consists of a drugs counsellor, a social worker, a financial adviser, a legal adviser, a leisure activities counsellor, and a sexual counsellor.

## **DAY 2**

### **CAREERS GUIDANCE IN ICELAND**

Modelled on the North American model-Iceland has a total of 220 advisers in the Professional Careers Organisation.

Prior to the 1990's, Careers Counsellors only worked within Education. Now work in a range of settings.

Advisers can choose one of two routes

- School counselling
- General guidance counselling

Post graduate and Masters qualifications are available. A distance learning qualification was introduced in 2001.

Four main areas of work-

- Educational & vocational guidance
- Personal guidance
- Careers Education(incorporated into Lifeskills in 1995)
- Evaluative and preventative work, plus research

An interesting point was that the Guidance Association was being asked by the Government to produce reports on Careers guidance issues. This provides the opportunity to lobby for careers guidance and the professionalism of the career- IAG PLEASE TAKE NOTE!

## **VISIT TO AN EDUCATION AND TRAINING SERVICE CENTRE (ONE STOP SHOP)**

Reykjavik has a total of 6 such centres providing a range of public services. The centre we visited was very impressive-modern, excellent facilities. Each centre takes responsibility for a specific area of interest, in this case-

- Multi cultural and diversity issues, including projects working with asylum seekers & refugees, the homeless & long term unemployed.

In addition to 2 vocational counsellors, the centre also has representatives from-

- Social Services
- Housing Services
- Disability advisers
- Financial advisers
- Recreational Services
- Pre-school and school support services

One example of work is the facility for electronic application for pre-school places

## **COUNTRIES PRESENTATIONS**

### **SPAIN**

Compulsory Education is between the ages of 6 and 16, although many children start at 3

At 16, students can opt to follow an academic (Baccalaureate) vocational or specialised(eg Music/Dance) route.

For those who didn't complete education, or new immigrants to Spain, Adult Education classes are offered in schools from 6.00-10.00 pm. Separate male and female classes are often offered with crèches provided.

The focus of guidance is at Secondary School, with teachers fulfilling a guidance role, alongside regional guidance teams-similar to Connexions Pas.

### **REPUBLIC OF IRELAND**

Ireland currently has a strong economy, with an influx of international companies, especially Pharmaceutical & Finance.

Unemployment averages around 3%, although in some areas as high as 15%.

The construction boom has led to a large influx of foreign labour.

Both advisers from Ireland were from the HE/FE sector, working in Institutes of Technology. One adviser was the only adviser in an institute with 2000+ students!

A new development is e.guidance- an on-line query management service.

## FINLAND

All Nordic countries follow a similar approach to Education and Guidance. One of the 2 Finnish representatives worked in a Vocational College for students age 16+ The counsellor also works as a teacher. The college also employs Social Workers.

An interesting option for adults is that those with more than 10 years' experience in a vocational area can take tests to gain the equivalency of a vocational qualification.

The 2nd representative worked in an employment office-each office employs an Occupational Psychologist. Educational and Vocational Services are offered – all free to young people and adults.

## WORKPLACE GUIDANCE

An interesting presentation about a project being sponsored by Leonardo. A number of countries are involved the UK being represented by the University of Glasgow.

The Icelandic Labour Force has a total of 38% of unskilled workers, often people who have not completed upper secondary or a vocational education. The Education and Training Service Centre works in conjunction with Lifelong Learning Centres to promote the value of learning within the workforce.

Companies are identified , visited, the project introduced informally to the workforce. Employees sign up voluntarily for a 30 minute “screening interview”, where needs can be discussed.

In addition, a programme has been established to train union reps as peer learning advisers within the workplace, providing information re. learning opportunities.

Validation of prior learning and work experience is also being sponsored by the Leonardo Programme.

## Evening

Bjarni organised a visit to the President's house-a site of historical interest-followed by dinner at the home of one of the local Careers Counsellors. A very enjoyable evening, with Icelandic fish stew!

## DAY 3

### THE ICELANDIC SCHOOL SYSTEM

Very similar to the rest of Scandinavia.

Most children attend pre-school up to the age of 6 as the majority of Icelandic women choose to work full time. Costs of pre-school are heavily subsidised by the local authority.

Upper Secondary(16-20) is optional but 96-98% of young people opt for it. Four options are available, dependent on test results-

- Grammar Schools
- Comprehensive Schools
- Industrial vocational Schools
- Specialised vocational Schools

Drop out rate can be as high as 40%-primarily from the vocational options.

Iceland has 8 Universities, and there's been a recent explosion in HE, especially at Masters and PHD level.

### COUNTRIES PRESENTATIONS

#### FRANCE

Primary School commences at age 6, until the ages of 10 or 11. College until the age of 14.

At 14, students choose a "gymnasium"-either general or technical, OR a professional school.

Careers Counsellors generally have a background in Psychology, but this is changing. They generally work in schools, job centres, universities.

Approximately 50-60% of students opt for professional schools, where they learn vocational trades.

### ADULT GUIDANCE WORKSHOPS

The majority of day 3 was taken up with a workshop, where in 2 groups we discussed issues around adult guidance.

Although we worked in a range of countries, we discovered that many issues were universal-

- The importance of our work as "agents for change"

- Lifelong learning opportunities , in relation to society's and individuals' responsibilities
- Specific target groups e.g. Refugees/asylum seekers, women returners,over 50's

It became clear that public funding – especially in Scandinavian countries – was generally much greater than in the UK, providing a more structured access for adults to return to education.

## **DAY 4**

The day began with a visit to the Reykjavik Employment Office, and an introduction to the 2 EURES advisers based there.

### **INTRODUCTION TO THE ICELANDIC LABOUR MARKET**

- Iceland's population is expanding
- Retirement age is 70, but can retire at 67 on a lower pension
- Average working hours are 42-43 per week
- Business Services are showing the largest growth
- Unemployment is currently at 1.4 %
- Average salary is approximately £26,000
- Women generally earn 65% of men's salaries

### **VISIT TO A YOUNG PEOPLE'S TRAINING CENTRE**

A very interesting visit to a training centre on the outskirts of Reykjavik, with a number of workshops, and vocational training areas including-

- Car valeting
- Computer printing
- Woodwork-specifically construction of summerhouses/playhouses
- Electrical/electronics
- Catering-producing meals for staff & students

Students are also encouraged to continue or complete their general education, and are supported by a team of counsellors and tutors.

The centre has a success rate of 75-80% of moving students into education or training. They are paid an allowance to attend the centre-much higher than those on Work Based Training in the UK.

The centre appeared very well equipped and reminded me of local provision such as Rathbone and Arthur Rank, and the opportunities they provided 10-15 years ago.

### **THURSDAY AFTERNOON**

Bjarni kindly organised a sightseeing trip for the group-visiting a national park, the geysers, and Gullfoss-an amazing waterfall.

The previous evening, a group of us had also enjoyed an evening sampling the very hot waters of the Blue Lagoon.

## DAY 5 IMMIGRANTS IN ICELAND

A presentation by Einar Skulason, director of the Intercultural Centre in Reykjavik. The centre opened in 2001, and is owned by the Red Cross

4.5% of the population in Iceland is made up of immigrants, approximately 14,000 people.

The centre provides a range of services-

- Counselling
- Legal advice
- Interpretation/translation services
- Courses in Icelandic, both in-house & out in the workforce
- A café/bar for developing social skills

(There is a legal right to access to an Interpreter if facing criminal charges, or dealing with the Health Service)

Iceland has very few refugees/asylum seekers. 70% of immigrants are from Europe and 75% of these are from Poland. Immigrants have to have a job before arriving in the country. It is a company's responsibility to request a work permit. Occasionally companies attempt to break the law by paying immigrants a lower wage. Unions often need to get involved.

### **LIFELONG LEARNING CENTRES**

The group visited the area of Akranes – an area on the west coast of Iceland-primarily a fishing community, for a presentation re. Lifelong Learning Centres.

The centre receives some funding from the State, but is also sponsored by companies, unions, and individuals.

Courses offered include-

- Tailor made courses for companies
- Leisure courses e.g. crafts, cooking, yoga, etc
- ICT
- Languages
- Specific courses for Immigrants

Every town in West Iceland has access to a learning room. Currently developing distance learning links with Universities.

### **SECOND CHANCE SCHOOLS FOR WOMEN**

These are primarily aimed at unemployed women, and offer a range of topics including-

- Self empowerment
- Spirituality
- Crafts/Visual Arts
- ICT
- English
- Health
- Careers Guidance

60-70% of women who've attended the school have joined the work force within 6 months.

20-30% have continued in Education.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The visit was extremely well organised by Careers Europe and our Icelandic hosts. It was very rewarding and informative to discuss careers guidance work with a range of European colleagues. A major conclusion was that countries paying higher taxes are able to provide a much better service to their unemployed clients than here in the UK.

There appears to be much greater opportunities for adults to return to education and vocational training. In addition, a compulsion for unemployed people(after a length of time) to undertake some form of education or training and be paid for it. An area of work where I feel the UK sadly falls behind.

Finally, I would recommend any adviser who has the opportunity to attend a Careers Europe sponsored exchange visit to take it. I'm sure they would find it a rewarding experience.

**JANE WALKER  
COVENTRY AND WARWICKSHIRE GUIDANCE**

**APRIL 2006**

