

Academia Report  
Ireland - 20<sup>th</sup> - 24<sup>th</sup> March 2006

DAY ONE

Agenda

*The Irish Educational System*

*The Guidance System in Ireland*

*NCGE & its activities*

*Informal presentations from each country group on guidance*

Day one was a really useful and informative way to set the scene for the rest of the week. It was an extremely busy day but one which provided a great deal of useful facts about both Ireland and the other participating countries.

*The Irish Educational System*

**Key Points**

- In Ireland education is compulsory for six to sixteen year olds. However, most schools would take children from the age of four.
- Education in Ireland has a holistic approach towards the child and the curriculum has spiritual, moral and cognitive dimensions. All pupils must learn Irish.
- Second level schools are referred to as **Post Primary Education**. This provision is for young people aged between twelve and eighteen years. Recent figures show that 90% of students will complete their education.
- There are three types of Second Level Schools - **privately owned** (run by religious communities), **vocational schools** (managed by Vocational Education Committees) and **Community & Comprehensive schools** (managed by the Boards of Management)
- **STRUCTURE OF POST PRIMARY EDUCATION**
  - **Junior Cycle** (3 years) - at the end of these three years the student would sit the **Junior Certificate Examination**
  - The student then has the opportunity to take an optional **Transition Year Programme**. This provides a chance to do work experience and develop new skills. Also provides an opportunity for the student to have time out from formal education.
  - **Senior Cycle** (2 years) - the student would be working towards the **Leaving Certificate Examination**. There are three different strands that a student can choose dependent on their longer-term ambitions and goals. These are the Leaving Certificate **Established** Programme (which has an academic orientation), **Vocational** Programme (which has both academic and vocational orientations) and the **Applied** Programme (which has an emphasis on vocational training). For the Leaving Certificate students will work towards a minimum of five subjects and a maximum of ten (one of which must be Irish). There are 34 subjects available at Leaving Certificate Level and students must pick carefully as the subjects they choose and the grades

they achieve at Leaving Certificate Level are the main basis of how University places are allocated.

- HIGHER EDUCATION
  - 55% of students progress onto third level education
  - **State Funded** - There are no fees for state funded HE. However, students must pay 800 euros every year for registering on the course. There are three different types of HE state funded provision - **Universities, Institutes of Technology** (where science and business subjects are studied) and **Colleges of Education** (which is where training for Primary Level Teachers takes place).
  - In recent years there has been a huge growth in **Private Sector** HE provision. Students must pay at these colleges and institutions.
  - Undergraduate Degrees - 3 - 4 years (most commonly 4 years)
  - Masters - 1 - 3 years. These are coursework/ research based
  - Doctorate Level - 2 - 4 years
- FURTHER EDUCATION
  - This is a huge growth area in Ireland. As the Irish Economy has taken off there has been a big focus on education for all.
  - Provision at FE level includes **Post-Leaving Certificate Courses, Second Chance Education** (e.g. vocational training opportunities, Youthreach, Senior Traveller Training Centres etc), **Adult literacy and basic education programmes** and **Apprenticeships**
  - There are around 30,000 people in Ireland studying some form of Further Education

### **The Guidance System in Ireland**

- PRIMARY

There is no formal guidance provision at primary school level, however there are some elements of guidance in the primary school curriculum.

- POST PRIMARY

The 1998 Education Act made guidance a universal entitlement. Each school is granted an additional teaching resource to assist it with its guidance provision ranging from eight hours a week in small schools to two full time posts in schools with over 1000 students.

Each school is expected to develop a school guidance plan as part of its school plan. The guidance counsellor is employed by the individual school and will have time allocated to a range of activities - including one to one work, group or class contact and other support activities.

Guidance Counsellors in Ireland should be a qualified second-level teacher and in addition hold a recognised qualification in guidance.

- YOUTHREACH

Youthreach is provision available for early school leavers and is vocationally based. Each young person who attends Youth Reach will receive careers

guidance as part of his or her programme. This will form around 3 hours a week of their programme. Some Youthreach staff members have been trained in non-formal guidance skills.

- **THIRD LEVEL**

All Universities and Institutes of Technology have career and counselling services available to students.

**NCGE & its activities**

The National Centre for Guidance in Education is...

*“An agency of the Department of Education and Science, established in 1995 to support and develop guidance practice in all education settings, and to advise the Department’s policy in the field of guidance”*

NCGE supports: -

- Teacher Counsellors/ Support Teachers in Primary Schools
- Guidance Counsellors in second level schools
- Guidance Practitioners working in Youthreach and similar programmes
- Guidance Practitioners working with adults in education
- Careers Advisers in third level education
- NCGE produces publications to aid guidance at Second Level. The publications currently available are ***The Guidance Counsellor’s Handbook, NCGE News, Planning The School Guidance Programme & various European literature.***

***Presentations from the visiting countries***

The afternoon on day one created an extra dimension to the visit. I was able to find out a wide variety of information on the different guidance and educational systems in different European countries. This enabled me to contrast the way that Connexions works in England and see the strengths and negatives of my country’s system and other European systems.

The participants on the programme came from a wide variety of guidance backgrounds. Their professions included Psychologists, Lecturers, Counsellors, Teachers, Careers Advisers & Personal Advisers.

***Interesting Facts***

- Both Ignacio & Martha from Spain work as teachers of vocational education in Post Primary Schools. This course provides students with the opportunity to become more career/ vocationally aware and also helps them to learn the skills needed to be successful when applying for employment.
- In Finland, children will receive guidance counselling from the age of 7. To work as a schools based guidance counsellor the worker has to be a teacher having done a Masters and must have studied Psychology. There are 270 vocational Guidance Psychologists in Finland.
- A large number of the group on the exchange were qualified counsellors. They felt that this definitely helped in their guidance work. In Ireland the guidance counsellor has responsibility for both guidance and counselling. With the growth of Connexions in England and the move away from being a Careers Adviser to being a Personal Adviser I

can definitely see the benefits to the client of having a counselling qualification.

- In Estonia, guidance is provided as part of youth work provision as well as part of formal education.

## DAY TWO

### **Agenda**

***Meet David Byrne & Brendan Oates at Coolmine Community School  
David & Brendan to accompany us on a visit to the Institute of  
Technology followed by a visit to Maynooth University***

This day provided an opportunity to see two very different types of third level education. In the morning we visited Blanchardstown's Institute of Technology. This is a very modern education provider and we were given a tour of all the campuses. The courses here seemed to be very vocationally based. There were excellent construction, engineering and IT facilities for students to use.

Whilst at this Institute of Technology we were able to speak to some students on the Health and Social Care Degree. This is a highly competitive course as jobs in this sector in Ireland are highly sought after and pay in the Health and Social Care Professions is high. The students on this course said that they had really enjoyed being on a course at an Institute of Technology because they were able to study the theory and also get excellent opportunities to gain hands on practical skills through the varied work placements that were offered.

The Institute of Technology had leaflets available throughout the campus explaining the many different services available to students. It seemed to offer holistic support to its students. Services offered included financial, academic and personal support through Student Support Services, Student Health Centre, Sports & Recreation activities, Chaplaincy Service and a Counselling Service. As well as these services the college also provided a prayer room for Muslims and a chapel for Christian students. The staff at the Institute were really interested in providing for the needs of their students to ensure that retention rate was high.

In the afternoon we visited a more traditional University in Maynooth. Again we were able to see some of the many facilities that are available to students studying here. The main focus of our visit to Maynooth University was visiting the Careers Centre. The Careers Centre at this University had decided to pioneer a different way of providing guidance to students. In the past students were given lengthy interviews where action plans would be developed. Now students will call into the centre and have short interactions with the staff and the focus is now centred on the student doing their own research. This enables the student to have ownership of his/ her own plans and also means that the Centre can offer a wider service to more students. The Careers Service at the University also helps to deliver guidance sessions geared

towards specific courses. This has also proved very successful in helping students to make the transition from studying into their chosen profession.

## DAY THREE

### **Agenda**

***Day spent at Coolmine Community School observing the work of David Byrne & Brendan Oates, meeting staff in the school & chatting to peer mentors in the school***

Generally guidance workers in post primary schools in Ireland combine both careers guidance and counselling in their workload. Coolmine Community School has an innovative approach to Guidance Counselling - David Byrne focusing his role in the school on providing careers guidance and Brendan Oates works specifically in a counselling capacity. Both David and Brendan combine taking classes with one to one work.

### ***Careers Guidance in Coolmine Community School***

David told us that he is timetabled to take 12 lessons a week. On the day of our placement David took a session on study skills. It was really interesting observing David's style of teaching and the information that was included in this session. Again (as seems to be the general ethos in education in Ireland) a holistic approach was adopted, for example David included sections on how diet can affect our ability to study.

Alongside group sessions David explained that his role was very varied. His job role included: -

- Providing all 5<sup>th</sup> year classes with one career guidance class per week
- One to one work
- Ordering publications and prospectuses and maintaining the Career's Library
- Organising an annual College Fair in School
- Organising and accompanying 6<sup>th</sup> Years to the Higher Options Conference
- Prepare students for interviews
- Complete references for students and help them to apply for employment, education or training
- Online monitoring of UCAS applications
- Arrange for visiting speakers to come to the school
- Arrange out of school visits for individual students to appropriate lectures
- Assist non-national students with international applications to Third Level Education

### ***Counselling Services in Coolmine Community School***

The majority of Brendan's work is on a one to one basis with students from the school. Students may self refer, be referred by a member of staff or Brendan may notice students who appear to be struggling or be behaving differently and quietly approach them to offer a counselling session. This is one of the benefits of Brendan being based at one particular school - he is

able to get to know the students well. Brendan will see clients for a range of issues and provides a confidential service. He also does some class sessions and on the day that we were shadowing him in school we were able to observe a session with a Junior class on Bullying. I really enjoyed watching Brendan's session, as it was interesting to contrast how a qualified counsellor delivers this session compared to how a Teacher would deliver a similar session. Brendan had a very caring approach to working with students.

Alongside Brendan and David there is a chaplaincy service in the school. Both Brendan and David said how busy the Chaplain is kept and that he is an invaluable colleague working closely with them.

Coolmine is a large school and because it is a community college it accepts all young people living within the catchment area. There are around 50 different nationalities of students. This has created a very accepting environment. It was clear to see from being part of the school for even just a short time that all the students integrated well with each other and they seemed very accepting young people. This is in part because the students at Coolmine are able to experience being alongside people from different nationalities and backgrounds on a daily basis. It was really noticeable to see that there was a truly integrated feel to the school.

Unlike Careers Guidance workers/ Personal Advisers in England both David and Brendan are employed under teachers terms and conditions by the school. This had some clear benefits including: -

- They both felt an integral part of the school rather than a visiting professional
- They are easily accessible on any day of the week by both students and staff
- They are able to build up trusting relationships with students over a number of years

One major difference between the guidance counsellors in Ireland and those in England is that because the guidance counsellors are employed by the school they only work during term time. There is no emphasis on outcomes of students moving into employment, education or training. If the student wanted to access services during the holidays they would need to visit one of the employment services centres.

### ***Peer Mentoring at Coolmine***

At Coolmine there is a group of Senior Students called the Meitheal. These students provide a support/ mentoring service to younger pupils. I met with these students and they said how much they enjoyed being able to support the younger pupils. Duties included helping the younger pupils to feel settled when they first joined Coolmine, being linked to specific classes and attending their registration so that the younger pupils could feel that they could approach the Meitheal and chatting to the younger pupils. This system worked really well in the school.

## DAY FOUR

### Agenda

**Visit to FAS Coolock Employment Service**

**Visit to Dublin City University Careers Service**

After two days on placement in various education providers in Dublin and the surrounding area the whole group met up today to visit FAS in Coolock and DCU.

### **FAS Coolock Employment Service**

At FAS we listened to a really interesting presentation by Josephine Rogers & Caroline Rowman who are both Employment Service Officers for FAS.

#### **Key Points**

- FAS Mission 2006 - 2009 is *“To promote a more competitive and inclusive knowledge-based economy, in collaboration with our stakeholders, by enhancing the skills and capabilities of individuals and enterprises”*
- Core Values - *Caring, inclusiveness and equality, proactive customer service, trust and partnership, cost effectiveness, professionalism, innovation and flexibility*
- FAS has four different types of service
  - **Community Services** - delivers a range of programmes including Community Employment, Community Training, Supported Employment & Job Clubs
  - **Training Services** - delivers specific skills training, In-employment training, Apprenticeship and Traineeship Programmes
  - **Services To Business** - provides training and company development programmes for businesses in Ireland
  - **Employment Services** - aims to act as a gateway to all FAS and other relevant labour market services to provide a national high quality recruitment service, which will help jobseekers to find the best possible job and to help employers to find the most suitable staff.

It was really interesting to hear about the Employment Services and also to look round the facilities at Coolock. FAS provide a similar service to Jobcentre Plus and one of its key aims is to help unemployed people to find employment or to return to the workforce. All jobseekers have access to the service but priority is given to those in danger of becoming long-term unemployed, early school leavers, people with disabilities and other marginalized groups. When Josephine and Caroline spoke about this I felt it sounded like Employment Services had some similar features to Connexions - as although Employment Services is predominantly a service for adults it provides a targeted service.

The Employment Service office had similar facilities to a Job Centre Plus office. There were facilities available to allow clients to use some of the services without seeing a member of staff - e.g. touch screen kiosk facilities with information on current jobs and training opportunities, guidance facilities

such as Career Directions and access to create a personal CV online via the FAS Job Bank.

Like the service provided by Careers Direct in Bradford, FAS Employment Services provides a vacancy matching service. Clients coded as seeking specific employment with the required skills and experiences are matched to employer vacancies.

### ***Dublin City University Careers Service***

Muireen Ni Dhuigneain (Head of DCU Careers Service) gave an excellent presentation in the afternoon with lots of interesting information on both DCU Careers Service and the broader picture of Third Level Education in Ireland.

#### ***Key Points***

- DCU is one of the newest Universities in Ireland and celebrated 25 years in existence in 2005.
- Mission of DCU Careers Service is to “*enable students and recent graduates to proactively manage their own careers, set realistic goals, make informed career decisions and develop the skills necessary to accomplish their goals by offering a range of services including information, education, advice and guidance with particular emphasis on web-mediated technology*”
- The Careers Service at DCU works with students, graduates and alumni, DCU academics and staff, employers and government agencies
- Muireen said that DCU Careers Service is following the UK model of guidance to try to incorporate Careers Education into courses. This enables more students to have access to the careers service, as time available for one to one guidance is limited. If students do have appointments they are called the morning of the appointment to remind them
- Muireen also spoke about the national picture. Mature students are going to be the focus for Third Level Education. This is because the number of young people has been rapidly falling, due to falling birth rates.
- Access is also going to take centre stage and at both DCU and other universities programmes are being established to encourage students to study. Programmes may include financial rewards for staying at school, pre-entry guidance, reduced entry requirements for people meeting other criteria. As in the UK they are also putting bridging courses on to plug the knowledge gap before entering a degree level course.

## **DAY FIVE**

The week's placement had been so busy that it was great on the last day to meet together with the group and to gather our thoughts on our week's stay. I found it really interesting hearing where other people had been on placement and what they had learnt.

I particularly enjoyed listening to the people who had visited Youthreach. This is a programme for young people who drop out of school early. I work with young people who receive alternative education and so it was interesting to hear about the programmes that Youthreach run. It sounds similar to some of the opportunities in the UK in that it is a vocationally based programme. If I had been in Ireland longer I would have loved to visit one of the centres to see first hand how it works. Ian (a fellow participant from the UK) visited Youthreach and found it really interesting and said there was a real buzz about the place.

## CONCLUSION

I have had a really fantastic time on placement in Ireland and would like to offer my thanks to Careers Europe and the Leonardo Da Vinci Organisation for arranging and organising the visit. I would also like to thank Jane Byrne and all at NCGE for all the work they put in coordinating our stay and making us all feel so welcome. Also thanks to David Byrne and Brendan Oates for making my time shadowing them so enjoyable. The week was packed with information and interesting visits and it has been great meeting other guidance professionals and sharing ideas and information. Over the week I received lots of useful resources and it is impossible to share all that I learned in a report. For more information please visit the websites listed below.

## WEBSITES

**NCGE** - <http://www.ncge.ie>

**NCGE resources** - <http://www.ploteus.net> & <http://www.guidenet.org>

**Euro guidance** - <http://www.euroguidance.org.uk>

**Youth reach** - <http://www.youthreach.ie>

**Guidance in England** - <http://www.connexions.gov.uk>, <http://www.icg-uk.org>,  
<http://www.careersb.co.uk>, <http://www.careersdirect.co.uk>,  
<http://www.careerseurope.co.uk>

**Guidance in Finland** - <http://www.cimo.fi>

**Guidance in Denmark** - <http://pub.uvm.dk/2004/guidance>

**Irish Education System** - <http://www.education.ie>

**The Institute of Technology, Blanchardstown** - <http://www.itb.ie>

**The National University of Ireland, Maynooth** - <http://www.nuim.ie>

**Coolmine Community School** - <http://www.coolminecs.ie>

**FAS** - <http://www.fas.ie>

**Dublin City University** - <http://www.dcu.ie>