

# Guidance Exchange Programme

## *Bucharest Romania*

*2<sup>nd</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> May 2006*

Organised by:  
Careers Europe, Leonardo Da Vinci and the Institute of  
Educational Sciences Romania.

John McGlacken  
Birmingham and Solihull Connexions

### Hosts:

Mr Mihai Jigau  
Mrs Michaela Chiru  
Mrs Angela Musca  
Mrs Luminita Tasica  
Mr Petre Botnariuc

### Participants:

SPAIN - Josep Vicent Bataller and Ana Rocajaroso Averroes  
FRANCE - Isabelle Tolosa, Christine Guillon and Jacques Aimard  
NORWAY - Lola Wedervang and Liv Berit  
SWEDEN - Ulrika Fridh  
IRELAND - Joan McSweeney  
UNITED KINGDOM - Lisa Ford and John McGlacken

*Luminita kindly met me at Bucharest airport in the early hours of Sunday morning. After a little confusion at the ATM - they are presently in a denomination process and have old and new notes working alongside one and other, we got a taxi to the University accommodation where I was to stay for the week. It being May Day Bank holiday on Monday meant I had a couple of days to do a bit of sightseeing and get my bearings before the start of the programme on Tuesday.*



*Academica University accommodation*

Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> May

### **Welcome at the Institute of Educational Sciences.**

Mr Mihai Jigau the Director of the Institute gave us a brief introduction to the Institute which employs 80 people including 20 admin staff. It is financed through the public budget and carries out various research projects. Mihai didn't have much time as he had to attend a meeting to discuss increasing the school leaving age from 16-18. This is typical of the work of the institute. Presently the legal school age is from 6 – 16, the leaving age having been raised from 14 two years ago. In practice most children go to kindergarten at 4 but it is not a statutory requirement. In order to raise the age upwards there must be well thought out reasoned arguments as it can be difficult enough to keep pupils interested in school up to 16. They must have firm links with employers to continue to make education relevant especially in rural areas where many families would find it a considerable financial burden.

### **Lifelong Learning and counselling department.**

Mrs Michaela Chiru then spoke to us about some of the functions of the Guidance and Counselling department. They have a network of 1200 guidance counsellors working in 42 centres across 5 counties. They are

concerned with the theory of education, the management of education, the curriculum and evaluation. Everyone in the network is obliged to contribute because they are publicly funded. They use focus groups in each county and have a main guidance counsellor contact in each county. They produce guides to help teachers such as lesson plans , they also develop IT systems to record client data – all of their publications have a distinctive cloudy logo. The main topics of last year were ICT for guidance and Adult Guidance.

75% of guidance practitioners have psychology, sociology and philosophy qualifications. The average age is under 30 because they only began training since the revolution so there are very few older practitioners. All practitioners have small specialisms so it is not enough just to have a university degree they have also done “Deep study”. There are only about 10 scholarships for post Graduate study so many people pay to study which is 430 euro per year. A lot of guidance now takes place at 13/14 before pupils go to Theory or Vocational School. A lot of input is now being done in getting Young people to present themselves orally and via portfolio because they need to distinguish themselves from pupils of other schools by more than purely exam results. This is because there are often discrepancies between school marking systems with the same grades in some schools easier to achieve than in another.

Since 1999, along with another 60 countries, including new members Turkey last year and Malta two years ago they are involved in the Euroguidance network undertaking projects with different countries. Present examples include:

A Distance Learning Project- developing 75 techniques of guidance by phone.

Producing an information pack of ICT skills for guidance practitioners.

A Manual for Educational and Vocational guidance(MEVOC) - a self assessment tool for practitioners to test themselves against 35 competences. This also includes web links to books and further useful information to get help on areas that practitioners feel they need support with.

The Young Project- a 3 year integrated programme of actions against school truancy and Child labour for pupils (15-17 years old ) that are at risk .

The PROVOC project- developing an assessment framework for agricultural qualifications (vocational rural trades).

The information and careers counselling project- a 10 year (1997-2007) project aiming to increase access to information, guidance and counselling to all categories of clients.

*After a large lunch in a traditional Romanian restaurant opposite the institute participants were invited to give a presentation about guidance systems in their home country.*



*The Group participants*

Joan from Ireland and myself had left our presentation materials back at the hotel so excused ourselves from desert and coffees and instead went on a fifteen minute jog which helped run off the very large first course and liven ourselves up for our impending talks which were received with much interest. The Scandinavian participants were particularly interested in a lot of the work done by connexions as they felt there were many ideas that they would wish to incorporate into their work given the opportunity. They particularly liked the idea of engaging disaffected young people in areas such as Music, Nail Art and Sports as a way of enticing them into the centres. Unfortunately the timetable over ran a little and not all countries had a chance to give a presentation.

*After this Angela took us on a visit to the Village Museum on the outskirts of Bucharest which showed examples of rural Romanian buildings from times gone by. We arrived a little late so I think the doorman cut us a deal as we did not have much time to look around before closing!  
In the evening we had a bit of free time to go and grab some food and unwind over a few Ursus beers.*

Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> May

### **Municipal Agency for Employment, Career Information and Counselling Centre.**

In the morning we visited the employment agency which was quite Spartan as a building in comparison to the new Jobcentreplus buildings we have in England but the help on offer was good and the staff seemed very committed. The services available are similar to those on offer in England.

The unemployment rate in Bucharest is presently 2.6% and stable, the national rate is 6.87%. The lowest rates are in the regions that lie next to the Hungarian border whereas the highest rate, 12%, is near Moldova in the north east. Romania is now lacking workers in certain occupational areas because of emigration- lots of people now go to Spain and Italy. They used to go to Israel but less go now due to the conflict .There are a lot of immigrant workers from Moldova and China that help to fill the shortages. One of the main areas of skill shortage is for construction workers and especially welders.

The minimum wage in Bucharest is 100 Euro per month which people can survive on in rural areas but it is very difficult in Bucharest. There are 23,000 registered unemployed in Bucharest which has a population of 2 million people. Out of these people only 8,700 are paid unemployment benefit as it depends on previous contributions. Unemployment benefit consists of 75% of minimum wage plus an amount determined by previous tax contributions. People can work at 16 years of age and people must have worked for one year before they can claim. People sign on monthly unless they are called for vocational training. The retirement age is 65 for men and 62 for women.

#### *Services:*

##### Work Mediation:

They receive weekly updates of jobs from employers and they then match unemployed people to vacancies.

##### Training/Qualifications:

Organising training in skill shortage areas with training suppliers. Unemployed people must complete training unless they are ill or find work, if not they must pay for the training. After training employers offer jobs to employees that they like.

##### Consultancy:

Helping people start businesses.

##### Loans:

50% of bank rate loans to people starting businesses.

##### Subsidies for Employers:

Financial incentives offered to employers who hire people with disabilities, people over 45, ex convicts, young moms, and people 3 years before retirement.

##### Counselling:

Visit schools three times a month to help leavers.



*The Jobcentre of Bucharest*

After the Employment Agency the rest of the day was devoted to visiting two schools- No. 195 and No. 75. The state schools are numbered rather than named- a throwback to the communist era.

### **School No.195 Visit and Group counselling activity**

At this School we observed a class with pupils aged 10 and 11. It started off with a nice gentle ice breaker involving a piece of Rope. They were asked to cross the rope if they liked sweets, knew the capital of England, or are happy. After this they were asked which jobs that they wanted which prompted a variety of responses such as Pilot, table tennis player and DJ but my favourite was to work for an association to destroy evil in the world.

The main part of the lesson involved the class being given green strips to represent the leaves of a Tulip. On each leaf they were asked to write what they wanted from their career, a personal success, an important date and a secret to put inside the bulb. They were then asked to individually stick the Tulips on the board and explain. They could reveal their secret if they wanted to but didn't have to. Very few revealed their secrets. The aim of the session was to show that people needed routes into a career or to achieve what they wanted and they would need the support of others. It also showed that they do not always need to reveal everything about themselves to achieve what they want and everyone has things personal to themselves. The class were very responsive and supportive of each other and although some were very shy everyone felt comfortable enough to take part.

We were then taken to the staff room and shown the work of pupils included in the monthly school magazine which was very impressive.

## **School No.75 Visit and Group Counselling Activity**

At the second school in another suburb of Bucharest we observed a class of 13 year olds in a class about coping with violent behaviour. The class were shown a clip of the Michelle Pfeiffer film *Dangerous Minds* and then asked how they felt after watching it. After being split up into small groups they then used the "GRAPE TECHNIQUE" - putting the word Aggression in the centre and surrounding it with the related words. They were then asked to use these words to develop an essay to answer the question "Is it possible to prevent this behaviour?". They played the music of Handel in the background as it is said to aid concentration. They then explained the essays by role playing.

We were then taken to be given an excellent singing presentation by some extremely talented pupils. They sang in English and in French and covered a wide range including songs by the Beatles and ABBA. The pupils had obviously spent months rehearsing and I felt quite privileged to be part of the audience.

*In the evening a few of us we went to a wonderful themed restaurant the Dracula Club to relax after a busy day.*

Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> May

*In the morning we had an early start as we had to get the Metro to the outskirts of Bucharest and then get picked up by the Mark Twain school bus.*

## **International school MARK TWAIN Visit and Group Counselling Activity**

The Mark Twain International School is a fee paying school catering for the children of diplomats etc. The class sizes were very small and the buildings very plush. We observed a class of 10 year olds in a well resourced library.

The ice breaker this time was getting the class to organise themselves in age order by using non verbal communication. This worked well and the class were in a line in age order in a few minutes. The teacher spoke about the person Mark Twain for a few minutes and said that he had a variety of jobs including being a River Boat Pilot and had said that Pilots were the only free people because they could be above the world by themselves, that the Mississippi river was his true teacher. The teacher said that the age of ten is not too early to think about careers because there is a lot to learn. The class were then asked to say what qualities were needed for careers. For example to be a Racing Driver they said you needed to be brave and strong. They were then asked to think of a colour or a taste for their chosen career. After this they were told to produce a business card for themselves as they would hope to be in 10 years time. This produced some very artistic and thoughtful results as they were asked to think about the resources that they already have and also the things that they need to gain. For all of the jobs they decided that calmness was an important quality. After the class we went into the counselling room and I was impressed by the props that they used like pictures of faces showing different moods in order for people to express how they were feeling.

*After the visit to the Mark Twain school we were driven through the rush hour traffic to the University of Bucharest. We passed by Piata Revoltiei where Ceausescu gave his infamous final speech prior to fleeing by helicopter from the roof of the former central Committee of the Communist Party building in December 1989 while many of the crowd below were being shot and killed. Some of the bullet holes are still visible in the walls of buildings.*

### **University of Bucharest, Vocational Information, Guidance and Counselling centre.**

The Centre was formed in 1997 has a staff of only 4 people and offers free and confidential advice to students and prospective students. They organise visits for students and also produce a number of publications to help students with things such as job searching and volunteering etc. The service is small and the staff are housed in quite a small office at the moment, but they are hoping to achieve greater funding to offer more services each year.

*In the evening a few of us had a quick look around the National Museum of Art before it closed and then went on to a Folk concert which had numerous performers some of whom had been imprisoned during the time of Ceausescu for their lyrics. Luminita kindly translated the words for many of the songs for me. The Concert was very moving but quite long. After 3 hours our stomachs started to rumble so we decided to go and get some food before the restaurants closed!*

Friday 5<sup>th</sup> may

*In the morning we returned to the institute of Educational Sciences for a conference.*

### **Dissemination conference Job Art- Central and eastern European: partnership for innovation and transfer in vocational training, Best practice in active learning methods.**

We were given a talk by the Pedagogic Manager Frank Lowndes. The project is made up of 11 partners in 6 countries. JobArt is a toolkit that enables vocational training organisations to modernise their training structures using the fields of digital and print media design as an example. Given the fact that 75% of teachers teach exactly as they were taught to teach many years ago the main emphasis is to update teaching methods by developing new training modules that incorporate the changing world of technology. More can be found out about JobArt at [www.jobart.org/cee](http://www.jobart.org/cee)

From ages 6 to 10 Children attend primary school, from 10 to 14 they attend Gymnasium and after this they either move into a vocational school or High school. Compulsory education finishes at 16. They then either continue within High school or onto higher vocational qualifications. At 19 people can attend University.

After lunch we visited a High school for pupils aged 15 to 18 and joined a group of prospective students on a talk and tour session.

### **Liceul Teuretic Grigore Moisil**

The college itself was similar to many I have visited in England with a well resourced library, good Lab and IT facilities. However there was a beautiful prayer/ Meditation room which was incredibly peaceful and ornate, this was very impressive and was well used by students. This visit was very interesting because on the tour around I had the opportunity to have an informal chat with the students leading the tour who had excellent English language skills and excellent communication skills in general. The students were very articulate, well mannered and with great senses of humour. The most striking aspect for me was the motivation of the pupils, the students said this was quite usual in Bucharest but that in the Countryside attendance was not so high because of transport and economic problems. Some students may have to walk miles to school and thus get up very early it was only the students with a great deal of self motivation that would do well.

*In the evening we all went to a traditional Romanian Restaurant for a farewell meal together. As we had come to expect the food and drinks were plentiful and a good night was had by all.*

Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> May

*In the morning we attended the Institute for the last time for a feedback session. On the way to the institute we stopped off to buy some flowers and gifts to present to our hosts who had been so kind and helpful towards us throughout the week, as this sadly would be our final session together.*

### **Feedback**

#### Positive aspects of counselling system:

- Counselling starts at a low age.
- Creative techniques used.
- Participation of pupils.
- Very supportive to all pupils
- Good balance of theory and practice
- Parental involvement.

### Negative aspects of counselling system:

Conflict of interests with staff employed by school but responsible to department.

Poor wages- 200-300 Euro per month is not enough to live on in Bucharest.

Very few men in profession.

Not every school has a counsellor. Only schools with 800 students or more must have a counsellor.

Very few Psychologists trained because it was forbidden prior to the revolution.

To change schools Counsellors must take exam again so many stay at same school or move into a private company.

*After the feedback and evaluation session we went for a visit with Petre to the Palace of Parliament. Now used as a conference centre:*



*View from the Palace of Parliament*

- It was built in 1984 as a tribute to the Egotistical Ceausescu.
- It is the worlds second largest building after the Pentagon.
- It cost 3.3 Billion Euro.
- He sanctioned the bulldozing of one sixth of the city to accommodate it.
- It was built while people starved and the economy was grinding to a halt.

*It was a strange almost guilty feeling to be impressed by the building when one knew of the price that had been paid in such recent times by the ordinary Romanian people for its construction.*

*After the visit to the palace we went on a farewell tour of the local bars which took us into the very early hours- a great night out which I paid for on my long trip home the next day!*

My Final thoughts on the weeks Programme:

- I enjoyed the variety of visits and being able to compare places such as the jobcentre where the help at hand was very good but the building and environment was not as glossy as in England.
- I especially enjoyed seeing the group works in school and the positive attitude of staff and pupils.
- I was impressed with the general behaviour in the schools.
- It was a shame that there were some barriers to communication with some participants only able to speak French and some English but it was a wonderful experience to be in a group of different nationalities for the week.
- It was a shame we didn't have a bit more time to share more information with each participant country.
- I would have also liked to have had more time to talk to the school pupils in an informal way as I found them very informative.
- I would have liked to have seen outside the capital but I realise that more time would be needed.

*I loved the general lack of tourism in Bucharest and finding some wonderful restaurants and bars that were not well signposted. I also enjoyed the Fantastic parks such as cismigiu and the genuine warmth of the Romanian people. While writing this report I have heard that the decision to allow full entry to the EU for Romania and Bulgaria has been put off again. Regardless of the Economical situation I can only think that the EU would benefit from welcoming such people.*

*John McGlacken  
May 2006*

