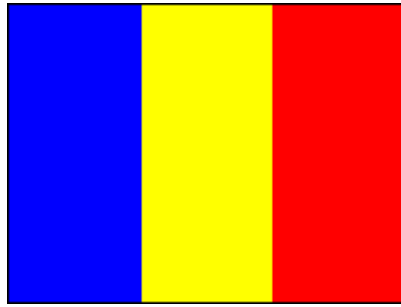


Bucharest, Romania



European Careers Exchange

1 May – 6 May 2006

By Lisa Ford

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Introduction

The exchange programme took place over five days from 2nd May to 6th May 2006. My placement was organised by Careers Europe in Bradford, UK and the exchange programme was in conjunction with the European Project Leonardo da Vinci. For more information on either of these organisations go to www.leonardo.org.uk/ and www.careerseurope.co.uk/. The programme hosts were The Institute of Educational Sciences, The Department of Lifelong Learning and Counselling.

My main objectives of the placement were;

1. To discover the counselling systems and strategies in Romania
2. To develop my own counselling skills through these discoveries
3. To learn about the educational system and training opportunities in Romania
4. To develop my understanding of Romania as a whole and the Romanian culture

There were eleven participants on the programme from Spain, France, Norway, Sweden, Ireland and England. The programme was offered in both English and French.

Tuesday 2nd May

The exchange programme commenced at the **Institute of Educational Sciences**. Our day was spent with the Department of Lifelong Learning and Guidance, our programme hosts. Throughout the day we looked at various topics;

- The Institute of Educational Sciences; it's purpose & aims
- The Department of Lifelong Learning and Guidance & it's research projects
- The Educational System in Romania
- The Counselling System in Romania
- Counselling & Education Systems in exchange participant's countries

- The Institute of Educational Sciences; it's purpose & aims

The Institute of Educational Sciences (IES) was re-established in 1990 after being closed in 1976 under the communist regime which did not accept the benefits that the IES had to offer Romanian society. The IES is affiliated to the Ministry of Education & Research which funds the organisation. The aim of the IES is to provide scientific findings through varying research methods and studies to be used to develop, or in some cases support, national education policies at pre university level.

Five departments exist within the IES. These are a) The Curriculum Development Department b) Education Management Department c) Evaluation Department d) Theory of Education Department e) The Lifelong Learning and Counselling Department. To find out more about the institute go to www.ise.ro.

- The Department of Lifelong Learning and Guidance and it's research projects

This department was the host of the exchange programme. The staff within the department met us from the airport, booked our accommodation, provided us with much information on the IES and Romanian systems and generally looked after us throughout the week. Mihai, the department director formally welcomed us and gave us some background information regarding the department.

"The Institute of Educational Sciences, the Lifelong Learning and Counselling Department ensures the coordination at the methodological level of the Psycho-Pedagogical Assistance Centres and Offices, acting in the education network. This department undertakes researches concerning the relevant topics in the field of guidance and counselling; adult career counselling, information and communication technology in career counselling, evaluation

of guidance and counselling activities, code of ethics and quality standards in career counselling, methods and techniques used in counselling and guidance.”

The members of the Department of Counselling are as follows;

Mihai Jigau – Director

Luminita Tasica – Senior Researcher

Mihaela Chiru – Senior Researcher

Angela Musca – Junior Researcher & exchange programme coordinator

Petre Botnariuc – Junior Researcher & IT specialist

Annually the department completes one to two research projects based around the guidance system.

This year the research project is to focus on lifelong guidance needs. The project involves going to five counties (there are forty two in the whole of Romania) and using various methods to look into what guidance counsellor's experiences and opinions can reveal regarding their client's long term guidance requirements. Research methods will include questionnaires, interviews and focus groups and around five hundred people will participate in these, the majority of them will be guidance counsellors. In law the Department for Lifelong Learning and Guidance coordinates the provision of guidance throughout Romania; therefore there is an obligation for counsellors to take part in the research project. The findings of 2006's project will inform the future deliverance of guidance counselling in Romania.

Luminita, a senior researcher went on to tell us about previous years research projects;

1. The department produced a guidance booklet named *Guidance & Counselling for young people in economically, socially and culturally deprived areas*. This is meant for the use of guidance practitioners or any other teachers that are interested in teaching guidances alongside their other subjects.
The booklet can be accessed on <http://ospzd.ise.ro>
2. The department developed an IT programme for recording information of clients who have received guidance. The system is now used in many ways; one particular use is to measure statistics.
3. The department produced an information pack with CD rom named *ICT skills for guidance counsellors: using ICT in guidance, practitioner competencies and training*. This involved theoretic and scientific research which had a practical use. As well as the production of the pack the project findings were published in a paper at the end of the year.

As well as carrying out these annual research projects, The Department of Lifelong Learning and Guidance have many links with various guidance organisations and practitioners throughout Europe. The department is

involved in many EUROGUIDANCE projects. EUROGUIDANCE ROMANIA exists as part of the European Union vocational programme Leonardo da Vinci. It acts like a resource centre that collects information regarding educational and vocation training and it disseminates it in the national network of guidance and other similar centres from Europe. EUROGUIDANCE was founded in 1994 by four European countries and now has sixty one members. For more information on EUROGUIDANCE visit www.euroguidance.org.uk. Some of the projects the department have been involved in through EUROGUIDANCE are as follows;

1. A project into telephone guidance counselling. As a result of the findings of the project seventy five counsellors were trained in delivering in telephone guidance.
2. ICT project. The European project developed a frame work for practitioners.
3. MEVOC – Quality Manual for Educational Guidance. The outcome of the project was a set a questions to test the skills of guidance counsellors designed to be sued as a self assessment tool based around thirty five competencies. A database was created to be used as a self learning tool to improve skills. To use this interactive tool go to www.mevoc.net. The website can also be used by clients as a tool to measure the quality of services they have received from a guidance service. There is a questionnaire that clients may use to give feed back to their guidance provider also on the website.
4. The Leonardo da Vinci *Young Project*. This project was designed to create and try out an innovative integrated formula for combating underage employment and school truancy in a European context. There were five partners involved in this project; Romania, Italy, Germany, France and UK. Findings can be seen at www.projectyoung.com.
5. The *Guidance is OK* project was co founded by the Socrates Programme. The project was aimed at drawing together results deriving from a range of Socrates projects dealing with guidance and counselling. These results provided a range of resources aimed at guidance professionals, teachers and policy makers and are available at www.guidanceisok.org.

- The Educational System in Romania

The compulsory age to begin education is six however many parents choose to begin their child's formal education at the age of four which they are welcome to do. The first school the child will attend is the primary school and the age of ten the child will continue her education at the gymnasium school. The child will remain at the gymnasium school till the age of fourteen.

At the age of fourteen the school child will face an important decision. The youngster has a choice whether to a) to continue with an academic education at a high school or b) begin a vocational and technical programme at a vocational training school.

Compulsory education finishes at the age of sixteen following changes to the system two years ago. We were told that the Romanian government is hoping to raise the school age further still to 18. This may be difficult to impose as in some rural areas of Romania, where unemployment is high, education is not valued as it does not and cannot always lead to employment. However as it is the government's wish to raise the school age, the Institute of Educational Sciences has been given the task of finding some scientific evidence to support the theory that increasing the compulsory school age will have beneficial effects.

At present, after reaching the age of sixteen students may leave the education system to find employment or progress onto post high school education until the age of eighteen. If the student wishes to go on to higher education they must choose the academic route of study and begin university at the age of nineteen.

- The Counselling System in Romania

The Romanian system of guidance and counselling services is composed of many networks, centres and services which come under the supervision of several state ministries. I feel it is not necessary to explain the bureaucracy of the counselling system at this stage, but the practicalities of the system as experienced by the Romanian school child.

The English equivalent to a Counsellor in Romania is a Careers Adviser, or more recently Personal Adviser. As the name would suggest, the role of Counsellor in Romania is a multi-functional one, providing many different services to learners in the institute the counsellor is based. The Counselling service in Romania offers the following services; careers advice, group sessions on various subject ranging from careers to bullying, class room activities, one to one support with personal issues and group sessions involving parents. The role of the counsellor will vary depending on the institute he or she is based on, in some cases the counsellors are involved in delivering academic subjects.

A school child's experience of counselling will differ depending which school they attend. As counselling is not statutory within schools, some children may have to receive a counselling service from a centralised service if their school chooses not to spend any of it's budget on counselling. There are 42 counties in Romania and each county has a centralised counselling service. This service can be accessed by anyone, so even though counselling is not

compulsory in schools, in theory each young person has access to a counselling service.

In schools which do choose to employ counsellors, counselling can begin at the age of six or seven. Young people will usually find themselves working closely with a counsellor at the age of fourteen when the decision is made whether to pursue an academic education or a technical and vocational one.

The background of each counsellor varies. Research done by the Institute of Educational Sciences show that currently there are 1200 counsellors practising in Romania and the areas of practitioner's expertise range from psychology, pedagogy, sociology, social work and philosophy. Under the communist dictator Ceausescu, many academic subjects were censored. Individuals who had an interest in censored subjects such as psychology were able to steer philosophy degrees towards their own interests and study subjects covertly. It is due to this fact that many counsellors have varied backgrounds whose subject of specialism at first glance will not seem geared towards counselling.

The role of counsellors and the system is to be revisited over the rest of the diary entries.

- Counselling & Education Systems in exchange participant's countries

After been given so much information on the Romanian projects and systems there wasn't much time for us to present information on our own systems. A few colleagues gave us well prepared but hurried presentations. Joan from Ireland presented on Adult Guidance in Ireland, John from Birmingham in England presented on the Connexions strategy and careers advice in England and Josef from Spain presented on the Spanish Educational system.

CULTURAL

The long day was fortunately broken up by a traditional Romanian lunch our hosts had organised for us in a restaurant close to the institute. We started with a platter of Romanian cheeses, sausages and vegetables such as radishes, cucumber, pickled gherkins and tomatoes with chunky white bread. The starter was so satisfying that I and my English colleague were amazed to see a main course arrive when we were expecting our dessert. The main course consisted of a tomato based stew with chicken and pork alongside some tasty polenta crowned with a fried egg. Our desert was a very traditional Romania dish called papa-nash; imagine two huge deep fried profiteroles stuffed with raspberry jam, very filling a bit too heavy for mid day but a nice end to the meal nevertheless.

Wednesday 3rd May

On Wednesday morning we met in the University Square and travelled on foot to the **Municipal Agency of Employment**. We were greeted there by four members of staff. Marian Craciun, one of the members of staff, gave us a talk on the following subjects;

- The Romanian economy including the benefit system
- The services offered by the Municipal Agency of Employment

- The Romanian Economy including the benefit system
 - Unemployment in Romania presently stands at 6.8%
 - Unemployment in Bucharest is currently 2.6%, one of the smallest rate within any region
 - Some regions in the West, where the economy is stronger enjoy even lower figures
 - In some regions in the East unemployment is as high as 12%
 - A new phenomenon the country is experiencing is a shortage of workers to fill certain positions. This is caused by a tendency of young people to go to neighbouring countries to get higher paid jobs. Romanians are finding work in countries such as Spain, Germany and Italy.
 - Areas of employment that currently face a shortage of workers are light industry, textiles and construction, especially welders
 - Romania looks to solve this problem by importing workers from China and neighbouring Moldova
 - The average wage is 300 Euros a month
 - The minimum wage is 100 Euros a month
 - Bucharest is the region with the largest numbering of openings of jobs
 - Bucharest and larger cities see higher wages due to higher rates of competition
 - Differing amounts of benefits are awarded depending how long one has been employed in the past and how much one has earned
 - The unemployment benefit is calculated by using the following information; 75% of minimum wage (100 Euros per month) + how long one has been in employment
 - The amount individuals receive as unemployment benefit vary greatly
 - To receive unemployment benefit one must have worked one year out of the past twenty four
 - However, graduates are able to receive an unemployment benefit of 50% of minimum wage for six months
 - A counselling service is offered to all for free, one does not have to be unemployed to receive it
 - If one is receiving unemployment the law requires one to report to the local employment agency once a month
 - Retirement for males is sixty five and for females sixty two

- The services offered by the Municipal Agency of Employment

All the services for the unemployed are free, one does not have to be receiving benefits to use the service but they must be registered to the agency.

1. Work Mediation. The Municipal Agency of Employment provides this service to two different clients; individuals and companies looking to recruit staff. This involves matching clients who are seeking to vacant posts. There is a website which allows clients to browse jobs which is updated weekly.
2. Qualification and Requalification. State run public training centres are present throughout the country and the employment agency's role involves liaising with such centres on behalf of clients. Every centre carries out annual research into what kind of vocational training is required. At present the labour market requires more workers to be trained in construction, joinery, construction, bricklaying, cheffing, waiting, hospitality, sales and PC operators. Once an individual begins a training they are committed to finishing otherwise they must pay for the course! One third of these training programmes are theory, two thirds are hands on practice. Training providers work with employers to arrange training placements. There are two routes of training; specialisation and initial training. Specialisation involves training in levels 2 and 3, each taking 5 months and 8 months respectively. Initial training is usually completed in 6 weeks. Benefits and travel expenses are continued throughout the training programme.
3. Consultancy. The agency provides advice and information for those considering opening a business
4. Loans. These are given to aid individuals who are starting a business. These loans are offered at half of the interest of national levels. In areas with high unemployment interest is less still at 25% of national levels.
5. Subsidiaries to businesses. Amounts are offered to companies who take on socially, economically or culturally disadvantaged young people. Such groups of people could be single mothers or ex-convicts. Money is also awarded to companies who employ over forty fives and people with certain disabilities.
6. Counselling Services . This service provides career advice and CV services, interview techniques and letter writing skills. Cognitive tests and software are used to identify client's strengths. Jobs fairs are arranged for certain client groups e.g. gypsies, graduates and older job seekers and the counselling services prepare clients through a range of activities such as mock interviews. Staff are obliged to attend school 3 times a

month to promote the agency's services. The agency is also responsible for researching and producing publications of job descriptions.

In the afternoon we visited two schools and observed group counselling sessions. The first school we visited was named **School Number 195**, naming the schools with numbers is something which was started in communist time and has continued.

The school was a gymnasium school based on the edges of Bucharest; we travelled there via the underground. We observed a class of around twenty seven students who were aged ten to eleven who were being taught by the school counsellor Marcela Calineci. When we arrived at the lesson we were introduced to the students and sat at the back of the class where we had a good view of the action. Our hosts from the IES, Luminta and Angela translated the class for us.

The lesson was aimed to get the children thinking about jobs; what types of jobs there are and what qualities each individual has to offer. The class started with a warm up exercise, the young people had to jump to either side of a rope, one side for yes, one side for no, after the counsellor asked them questions such as who likes sweets, who smokes, who knows the capital of Norway. The questions were used humorously, the young people were having fun and you could see the rapport between the counsellors and the students, and also between the students themselves.

To get the learners thinking about careers Marcela held quick brain storming session where she asked questions around careers; What is it? What kind of jobs are there? What skills will you use? The ideas were listed on the board.

Then came the main activity of the lesson. Each learner was given coloured pieces of card. Each piece together made a flower with a stem, a petal and flower bud. The counsellor asked the children to think about the career they wanted to pursue and then a quality they would need in their career choice. The required quality was then written by the children on a certain piece of card. The children were given an example of friendship and ambition. Further questions were asked by the Marcela such as think of an important date in your life and also think of a mystery. The young people wrote down the answers on the parts of the flower. When all the answers had been written, the children took it in turns to stick their flower on the wall at the front of the class and presented their answers to the class. The young people did this with confidence and ease and the atmosphere was very relaxed and convivial, the school children seemed to know each other well and it was a pleasure to watch them listening to their contemporaries and joking and teasing each other.

It was also evident that Marcela had a close and caring relationship with the young people. Everybody participating in the class seemed to enjoy it and

the activities Marcela had prepared, especially the flower activity, were very affirming, positive and student centred. Opportunity arose to chat with Marcela at the end of the session. She told us she had created the activities herself and was hoping to write a book around such methods. Marcela is obviously a creative woman and the young people responded very well to her methods and style.

An action packed day; we then moved on to a second school named **School Number 75** where we again observed a counsellor in action, this time with a group of twelve to thirteen year olds. In this school we saw the counsellor Ani, deliver a lesson on aggression and prevention.

Children observed a clip of the film 'Dangerous Minds' which showed scenes of aggression and fighting in a school setting. The young people then briefly discussed what they had seen and their thoughts. They were then split into groups of four or five and were told to choose a word such as violence or bullying. The group then brainstormed the word as the final product they created was a short essay. Ani allowed the learners around twenty minutes to do this. While they worked Ani played pre-Baroque classical music which studies have shown is proven to stimulate the mind.

The young people then presented their essays at the front of the class. Then came the most interesting and impressive part of the lesson; the students intently debated with one another over each others opinions. They showed contemplation and intelligence which impressed us all. Such a lesson depends on the contribution of the students and in the case the exercise was a complete success. Having taught myself, I would have been pleased to facilitate such interaction between students of 16 in England. I'm not sure what the reasons were for the mature and thoughtful attitude of the young people. Talking to Ani at the end of the lesson it was interesting to hear what she said about the Romanian attitudes towards authority and education. The behavioural challenges the Romanian schools face are relatively few, especially when compared the situation in Britain. Part of the reason for this is the communist regime which taught citizens to be obedient.

CULTURAL

After such a busy day some colleague and I splashed out on a three course meal at a themed restaurant based around the famous Dracula novel by Bram Stoker. We knew we had found the *Count Dracula Club* as fake blood seeped out of the exterior of the building dripping down the walls. We rang the iron bell and a sinister looking waiter opened the door. Once inside we had a choice of rooms in which to dine. In each room the windows were blacked out and had it's own theme inspired by the novel such as 'The Hunting Room', 'The Chapel' and 'The Library'. We chose the Medieval Room filled with family portraits. I had a delicious starter of goulash with extremely tender beef followed by a succulent duck dish. We tried some Romanian wine, a cabernet sauvignon, which was gorgeous. Everyone on the exchange was pleasantly

surprised by the high quality of Romanian wine (even the French!). The *Count Dracula Club* was a fantastically kitsch dining experience and unlike many themed restaurants the food was not a secondary feature.

Wednesday 4th May

The day began with a visit to the private and international school named **The Mark Twain International School** located in a wealthy suburb outside Bucharest. The wealth of the area could quickly be identified in the presence of houses. The majority of Bucharest residences are blocks of huge grey flats built during communist times. The school is for fee paying students and learners come from all parts of the world.

We observed a session with a class of nine to ten year olds in a very small class of 12 with a counsellor named Florentina Marcinschi. The session was aimed towards developing ideas around future careers and skills needed. The young people were read a quote from Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain on the youth's perspective of the future which set the context and mood of the lesson.

A brain storming session around careers was followed by an activity which saw the learners produce a business card for themselves. Florentina had a number of real business cards she distributed to the pupils. The class were encouraged to imagine themselves in the future and envision themselves working. They had then to think of qualities which were needed and include them on the business cards. After producing the business cards the youngsters presented their cards to the class. This activity proved to be an inventive and well received method of getting young people to think about their futures and also to build their confidence by standing up in front of their contemporaries and questioning and explaining their choices and reasons.

We had chance to have a look round the school which was a bright newly built building which had excellent resources and facilities. Florentina explained her role to us which was very varied and interesting. As well as delivering lessons, she holds sessions with parents, looks after sick students and deals with behavioural problems.

The Mark Twain mini bus dropped us at our next destination, **The University of Bucharest Counselling Centre for Students**. There were met by Nadia Alexe and Marian Cracium who gave us a talk on the services they offer. The Centre offers a wide range of services from giving out careers advice, advising prospective students to producing university prospectuses. In summary here the main points they gave us;

- The Counselling centre was founded in 1997 and has 4 members of staff
- The centre provides professional counselling (careers advice), advice and information to students who are in their final year
- Students who are not in their final year can use the centre as a information point on university courses

- Other services the centre provides for graduates are interview preparation, CV guidance and advice with letter writing
- Volunteer opportunities are organised by the centre for graduates
- The centre organises a jobs fair which student volunteers help to organise and staff
- Students are prepared for the jobs fair and meeting potential employers by the centre which holds mock interviews
- Annually the centre holds an education fair for student's considering Higher Education to promote opportunities available in the University
- The centre is responsible for producing various literature including a job seekers guide and brochures for each faculty of the university listing information and the content of courses

CUTURAL

Our hosts invited us to “a traditional Romanian concert” and we went to the theatre expecting to see some people dancing around and singing in traditional Romanian outfits (imagine lederhosen crossed with bear skin and will you get the look of the national outfit). However, the event exceeded our expectations. Held at the People’s Theatre, a sixties equivalent of the Royal Albert Hall, the event named *Good Man* began by honouring participants of the 1989 revolution. Revolutionaries were called up on stage and their contribution to the revolution was explained to the audience who were clapping and cheering whole heartedly fifteen years after the events. After the initial presentation a host of artists performed their own songs. Mostly the songs were about political events past and present. One woman who seemed to be the most popular of all the acts dues to her comical lyrics and original use of the guitar sang acoustically with a guitar; “Ceausescu! He’s not dead” in reference to the present government. Some other acts dedicated their songs to fellow revolutionaries who had since died. Luminita translated the show to us explaining the artist’s backgrounds, some of whom had been political prisoners during communist time. The concert was a fantastic way to learn about the fascinating social and political history of Romania and was a very moving experience.

Friday 5th May

Our morning was spent back at the Institute of Educational Sciences for the **Job Art Conference**. The conference delegates consisted of Romanian counsellors and European researches who had taken part in the Job Art project.

Job Art is a pilot project of the Leonardo da Vinci programme. The Job Art website describes the project as an “creative approach to training and employment. It is a framework training curriculum developed in four EU countries as a Europe-wide transferable model for occupational preparation and vocational training preparation in the fields of event production and digital media design. Job Art is a project by a consortium of four partners in France (ARVHA, Paris), Germany (Die Wille, Berlin), Spain (IMFE, Reus) and UK (Proper Job Organisation, Huddersfield)”. Romanian and Polish partners have had an involvement in disseminating and developing the job art project also.

Findings of the Job Art programme can be used to enhance training programme and lesson plans and models have been designed specifically with disadvantaged young people in mind. The comprehensive website www.jobart.org/ offers much information on the project. Lesson plans for the training curriculum can also be found on the website. A toolkit has also been produced that contains a series of diverse training plans with supporting materials and step-by-step syllabi available in five languages including Polish, Romanian, Hungary and Bulgarian.

We were given a presentation on the Job Art programme, then practitioners were able to offer their thoughts and experiences of the programme. It was a good opportunity for colleagues to share good practice and keep abreast of emerging issues.

The afternoon was spent visiting an **Academic High School**. As I've mentioned previously when school students get to the age of fourteen they have a choice regarding which school to continue their education. Our group was able to join a group of potential students in a tour of the school. We toured round various subject class room a where subject teachers told us the content of the syllabus. As the school was an academic one we were told of maths, science, IT and PE programmes amongst others. We were shown round by two fifteen year old young men who had excellent language skills. We were also given the chance to chat with the students ask them about their experiences of counselling and education system. It was refreshing to be given the chance to chat informally in contrast to the many talks we had been given over the week.

Saturday 6 May

The last day of the programme we returned to the Institute of Educational Sciences. With the hosts Angela and Petra we evaluated the counselling system in Romania discussing the strengths and weaknesses. Angela made a note of them on the flip chart and I've added a few more of my own thoughts;

strengths	weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Begins at a young age offered from school years 1-13○ Counsellors use creative techniques○ Activities are affirming & positive○ Group work is very inclusive○ Counsellors deliver a good range of practical & theoretical info○ Access for every child○ Evidence of excellent relations between young people & counsellors○ Qualified professionals	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Not enough autonomy for counsellors○ Counsellors have 2 bosses – the school head & the counselling centre manger – conflict of interest○ Many counsellors work at private schools due to low wage○ Lack of psychologists due to communist regime○ Not a counsellor in every school○ Low wages & high turnover of staff

After our formal session had ended we presented our hosts with gifts such as wine and flowers to thank them for organising our placement and looking after us so well. They had done a great job!

CULTURAL

We visited the Place Parliament, a building which is said to be the biggest in the world (prior to 9/11 it was the pentagon). The Palace Parliament was built under Ceausescu orders from 1985 to 1989. It was built non stop twenty four hours a day during this time and descends four floors under ground. A tour guide showed us round around ten of the many rooms. The building is filled with marble pillars and stair cases, thousands of crystal chandeliers and hundreds of silk rugs. Marble of varying colours lines the floor, wall and ceilings while eighteen foot curtains frame some of the longest windows in the world. One sixth of Bucharest was bulldozed in order to make way for Ceausescu's dream and experts cannot put a value on the palace and it's contents. All the materials used in the building are resourced from Romania which highlights what a country rich in minerals it is. The tour ended on the balcony of the palace which faced onto a huge boulevard and two grand and ornate buildings Ceausescu had constructed to compliment the palace and to grant a regal view from the building. To see the building and to tour it was a staggering experience and is a must see if you are ever in Bucharest.

Conclusion

The exchange programme was an interactive, motivating and exciting way to gain knowledge on counselling systems in Romania and also other European countries systems through speaking with other exchange participants. I would say all my objectives were met and I have learnt countless other lessons too.

Romania in 2006 is an interesting place to visit. As it prepares to be accepted into the European Union, Romania is very open to change and ready to accept and adopt ways in which to improve and develop systems. In order to prepare for my visit I researched Romania through reading news articles and Romanian history. What I experienced on the exchange did not altogether match the picture that had been painted to me. Having heard that Romania was ordered to take control of the corruption within the government before it can join the EU, I imagined a poor country that was struggling to develop. From visiting and discovering systems in place I was impressed by the progressive and positive policies. One thing which I found particularly impressive is the policy of subsidising businesses which employ people with disabilities and those who are in danger of social exclusion. I think Romania will undergo many changes over the next decade as it look towards Europe for inspiration. I hope however that Europe also looks towards Romania as an example, as from what I experienced and from what is hopefully illustrated in this report, it has much to offer.