

Careers Europe

Academia Visit to Oulu, Finland

20th – 26th May, 2007

Funded through the Leonardo Project

Report by Emma Higman, Connexions Somerset

Introduction:

I am a Team Leader working for Connexions Somerset. I am based in Yeovil, and work across the South Somerset area. I currently work on a part-time basis - 3 days per week. I manage a team of seven delivery staff, a mixture of Personal Advisers and Employment and Training Advisers. I am responsible for Connexions delivery across a locality area that includes three secondary schools, two 11-18 and one 11-16. Connexions Somerset delivers both careers guidance and additional support to students in these schools, thus providing a holistic support service to the young people up to the age of nineteen (or twenty-five for those with learning difficulties). I am also responsible for co-ordinating delivery of staff within our Community team. This team concentrates on the 16-19 year old age range and targets those not in education, employment or training. I have a particular interest in the training of Personal Advisers (PAs). I am a trained NVQ assessor and currently assess staff for NVQ Levels 3 & 4 in Advice & Guidance and LDSS. I also take an active interest in the Diploma in Careers Guidance programme. I have two members of my team undertaking this qualification and I am the designated mentor for one of these PAs.

Arrival:

I travelled to Finland on Sunday 20th May. Travel involved a 3 hour flight to Helsinki, followed by a 1 hour internal flight to Oulu. There is a 2 hour time difference between Finland and the UK. Finland is part of the EU and the currency is the Euro.

Oulu:

Oulu is the largest city in Northern Finland, it is located on the shores of the Bothnian gulf, 607 km from Helsinki and 230 km from the Arctic Circle. It is the 6th largest city in Finland with a population of 130,000. Oulu is one of the world's foremost technology cities, local universities pride themselves on turning out high calibre IT and technology graduates with Nokia being the largest employer in the city.

Academia Group:

There were 14 participants in the Finnish programme from all over Europe. Countries represented were UK, Ireland, Iceland, Czech Republic, Italy, Estonia, Spain and France. All the participants are working within the sphere of guidance counselling although roles varied including private entrepreneur, researcher, director of guidance counsellor training and teachers.

Day 1:

Today began with an introduction by the project hosts, followed by a lecture on the Finnish Education System. The afternoon consisted of a visit to the Oulu Employment Office where we listened to a talk by one of the managers.

Introduction to programme and host region

The study visit was organised by Mikka Kekki a representative from CIMO, the Centre for International Mobility based in Helsinki. CIMO promote cross cultural communication and mobility and run the Finnish Euroguidance Centre – supporting guidance counsellors across Finland, particularly in the European context.

Seija Lehto was the local co-ordinator for the programme. Seija is the Senior Guidance Counsellor for Oulu Vocational College.

Seija and Mikka introduced themselves, outlined their roles and explained the programme for the week.

Lecture: Guidance & Counselling in Finland – Dr Helen Kasurinen, Finnish Board of Education

Features of the Finnish Education System

- Equal opportunities irrespective of age, domicile, sex, economic situation or mother tongue
- Free of charge including higher education
- Publicly funded almost entirely
- Centralised steering , local implementation

Education System

Compulsory education begins at 7 years old. Pre-primary education (6 years) is voluntary although 90% enrol.

Basic Education (7-16 years) for all young people

Optional 10th grade for those not progressing onto 2nd stage education. Aim is to support special educational needs, improve grades, language skills and/or work placement.

Second stage education: General Upper Secondary or Vocational Upper Secondary. Delivered in different schools.

General Upper Secondary more traditional/academic route. Vocational Upper Secondary includes at least 6 months on-the-job learning

University or Polytechnic

Progression Routes

2004 School leavers:

54% Upper Secondary General Education

38% Upper Secondary Vocational Education

2% Optional 10th year compulsory education

5% did not continue in education

Guidance and Counselling

The Finnish Board of Education are responsible at a national level for curriculum guidelines for guidance provision in basic, vocational, upper secondary general and adult education. They also lead evaluation and development projects, in-service and pre-qualification training.

1970s reform – student counselling introduced to compulsory schooling. Integrated into education.

Student counsellors are employed by the schools.

There is a variety of provision of guidance in upper secondary education. Some full-time, some part-time counsellors. Some combine teaching with counselling. Aim of new government is to improve consistency.

Legislation:

- Acts for comprehensive, upper secondary and vocational education – pupils entitled to educational and vocational guidance during every working day in school, often delivered in group setting
- Student counsellors responsible for educational & vocational guidance

- Links to working life including work experience
- Guidance & counselling in classrooms + opportunity for personal counselling

New curriculum guidelines advise that guidance starts in 1st grade of comprehensive education – age 7.

Main objective of counselling is empowerment

Guidance available for adults in educational setting

Unis and polys must have procedures in supporting students in making individual study plans for learning and career management skills. Comprehensive guidance and counselling services

Issues

- Inconsistency in guidance provision in education settings
- Gender segregation in the labour market
- 2004: 5% failed to continue with post-compulsory education. Figure lower in 2007 but still an issue
- Competition for university places very high, no national application system for unis but there is for polytechnics. 30% applicants are unsuccessful. Need for guidance. Employers place high value on educational achievement

Training of 'school counsellors' in Finland

Training defined by legislation but does not cover university sector.

Training available in four universities.

Masters degree+ teacher training or in-service (vocational) training + teaching + counselling programme.

All counsellors are qualified to teach a particular subject

NB: higher/broader level of qualification than required in the UK

Visit: Oulu Employment Office - Vocational Guidance Services in Finland

First impressions:

The employment office is very large, light and airy with a lovely glass roofed café. A large, open area housing information resources and computer terminals. A quiet and pleasant environment. A very inviting resource centre, open and accessible to all

Lecture: Ms Marita Rimpelainen-Karvonen – Manager for Vocational Development Services

Ministry of Labour runs 147 Employment offices in Finland

New government plans to establish Ministry of Employment with aim to create a knowledge-based welfare state with employment opportunities for all.

- Goals:
- reduce unemployment & exclusion (high structural employment)
 - ensure availability of skilled labour
 - enhancing work productivity in a sustainable manner
 - increase employment of immigrants
 - increase self-employment & entrepreneurship

Oulu Employment Office:

Self-service internet services including vacancy database, CV writing. Group services offered on job-seeking skills and also Personal Employment services – individual guidance interview, assessment, skill mapping etc. EURES service for those interested in working overseas.

Emphasis on it being an 'employment' not 'unemployment' office. All services are free of charge but have to prioritise. Priority groups; Under 25s without vocational education, young people with special needs, health problems, long-term unemployed ie: 1 year +. These groups are likely to be referred for support with Guidance Psychologist, 3-5 appointments will include testing.

120 employees in the employment office. Include Psychologists and Employment counsellors providing careers counselling. Education Advisers mainly an information role.

All under 25s without vocational education can access the service in addition to adults. (Young people in education would access service via education institution)

Under 25s can access career counselling, education/vocational information, job-seeking services, individual interview, practical training, work experience.

Vocational rehab – services for employees with health issues.

Benefits available but have to be active in job search – based on an individual action plan that is reviewed.

There is a separate 'Labour Service Centre' in the city aimed at supporting long-term unemployed. Run by employment advisers and social workers. This would have been interesting to visit.

National Unemployment rate approx 7.7%, 18.8% for under 25s, highlights an issue with an older population holding down jobs. Retirement age is 65.

Issues:

High level structural unemployment

Aging population

Reliance on Nokia, concerns could move to Asia

Increase in mental health issues esp. young people

Day 2:

We had an early start this morning as we were travelling to the Swedish/Finnish border – a 2 hour bus trip. The journey was broken by a coffee stop looking out across the Gulf of Bothnia. We were provided with excellent refreshments on the coach which kept us all in good spirits. The roads were mainly bordered with forests, demonstrating the significance of the timber industry particularly in the industrial past. We arrived at our destination, the West Lapland Vocational Institute in Tornio, at 10.30am.

We received two presentations this morning and a tour of the college. The first presentation was given by Ms Ritva Nousiainen, talking about cross-border co-operation between Tornio in Finland and Haaparanda in Sweden. The second

presentation was a brief overview of the provision of West Lapland Vocational Institute. This was followed by a delicious three-course lunch provided in the college student restaurant. We then crossed the border into Sweden where we visited the Swedish Folk High School and also had a talk by the EURES adviser from the Employment Office in Tornio.

The day ended by a sightseeing visit to the Kukkola rapids on the Tornio river. We returned to Oulu at 7.30pm.

Presentation: Cross-Border Co-Operation

Haaparandatornio – the two places are often talked about as one due to the close links. Only 1.5km separates them.

Haaparanda – 10% unemployment, 10,200 population

Tornio – 13.5% unemployment, 22,400 population

Located on the border of region of Lapland. Region referred to as Bothnian arc is the northernmost expanding region in Europe.

Cross border co-operation seen as critical for survival, better services, development and growth.

Aim is for borderless education, community planning, use of facilities. Borderless education began 1978 ie: schools and colleges prepared to accept any students. Common language since 1989 – 70% residents in Haaparanda speak Finnish.

A huge building development project is taking place between the two towns. The new area is designed to join the two places. The development consists of new housing, commercial areas and business units. Ikea have opened a major new store here which is seen as a major attraction.

Presentation: West Lapland Vocational Institute – Pentti Heikkila, Principle

The college principle gave us a brief overview of the provision of the college.

1310 students, 60% from Lapland. The college has four other sites but 900 students are based on the main campus in Tornio – study areas predominantly technology (450), culture (309), service (130). The college has an additional 1000 adult students. There is a big steel industry locally and so the college provides study opportunities in metal work and machinery which are very popular.

The presentation was followed by a tour of the college. We visited the art, media and music departments. I was struck by how modern many of the college buildings were. Also the level of resources was incredible. They had a

multimedia suite containing a huge range of specialist equipment for animation. A large concert hall equipped with a vast range of lighting and sound equipment, they had fully equipped recording studios for music students all with top of the range equipment.

Education is free for all, students receive free education, free resources, free lunches and even free boarding for those living too far away to travel on a daily basis. The level of resourcing for vocational education is very impressive, even the gym was free for students.

Visit: Finnish-Swedish Folk High School, Svefi Academy, talk by Raija Hiivala

Established in 1973, a Nordic phenomenon. Folk schools began in Denmark to provide liberal adult education. There are now 114 in Sweden. Very free in what is delivered, not government directed, can develop own profile.

This particular school was founded to support Fins in progression in Sweden

Focus is on music, arts and performance. 70 students. Co-operation with employment office currently 10 students on placement. Also have 150-200 distance learning students via adult education.

Presentation: Tornio Employment Office – Pettr Tikkala (EURES Adviser)

EURES – European Employment Service

700 EURES advisers across Europe, 22 in Finland. Active role in cross-border project.

Pettr gave an interesting perspective on the cross-border development which contradicted some of the aims of the project that had been presented to us in the morning. He stated that in reality Ikea employ 140 Swedes and 10 Fins. This is due mainly to language difficulties, as although Swedish is an official language in Finland and taught in schools, the majority of Fins are not proficient enough in the language to conduct their day to day work. Interestingly Ikea have refused to disclose their actual employee figures but this information has come from an employee.

The impression given is that there is a lot of cross-border education, however the figures given by the college in Tornio suggests a different picture, as the numbers of Swedes studying there were by far a minority. For example; the teacher cited 10/80 for music.

Pettr stated that the taxation and social security systems create major issues for employees working cross-border.

Day 3:

Transition from initial education to working life, cross-sectoral co-operation in guidance

Today we were set an activity which involved using GPS and mobile phone technology to navigate our way around the city and complete a number of tasks. The day began with an introduction to the technology and then we were sent on our way to complete the activity in pairs. We returned to the base at 3pm when we then evaluated the exercise. In the evening we were invited to a reception at Oulu City Hall, followed by an informal dinner and sauna evening hosted by the principle of Oulu Vocational College.

Task: City Orienteering

The City of Oulu Department of Education is conducting a project to look at the use of mobile phone technology as an educational tool. Our group took part in this project by completing an orienteering activity using mobile phone technology. The group was divided into pairs and each pair was given a mobile phone and a GPS navigator. Our task was to use the GPS navigator to find our way to various locations within the city centre. At each location we had a task to perform ie: taking photos, video clips or sound recordings which we had to send via the mobile phone back to the base.

For our own learning objectives, the purpose of the day was for us to visit various educational/vocational setting within the city and to investigate some of their guidance processes.

We were set the following tasks:

1. Swedish Kindergarten

Task: Interview the personnel to find out how the children are guided to school and how is information about them transferred.

2. Oulu International School

Task: Familiarise yourself with the learning environment. Take photos of meaningful activities.

3. Job Centre

Task: Ask how a foreign person can get a job in Finland. Tape your summary.

4. Oulun Lyseo Upper Secondary School

Task: Interview the students in the classroom 12 about guidance and counselling at school

5. Myllytulli School – Basic Education

Task: Take photos of teachers and the learning environment, interview teachers and students

6. Oulu Vocational College, Myllytulli Unit

Task: Visit the beauty care department and find out how they are supported in their learning. Record videos.

This was a really innovative and fun exercise, however unfortunately the technology did not work sufficiently well. As a result of this, the value of the exercise got somewhat lost and the technology took over as the main focus rather than as an educational tool. In my pair we ended up not getting around to all of the tasks which was a shame as we were looking forward to interviewing some students about guidance. Most of the information that the group sent back to the base via the mobile phones was lost apart from the photos.

I made some observations throughout the day:

- Relaxed approach to security in schools and kindergarten
- Proficient level of English spoken amongst 15 year old students we observed
- Spoke to a hairdressing student in her 30s retraining after a career as a secretary. All tuition on her 3 year course is free + she receives free meals in college
- Military service is compulsory for males in Finland, can defer if pursuing higher education
- Learning styles are so varied. Interesting how different individuals reacted to the technology

Evening:

We enjoyed our reception in the very ornate surroundings of the City Hall, we were hosted by the Director of Innovations and Marketing and the International Affairs Manager. We were then transported by coach to a large log cabin, built by students of the college. We had a wonderful meal followed by the opportunity for a sauna.

Sauna is an essential part of Finnish culture. Indeed most houses have a sauna and many hotel rooms. It is not customary for men and women to share a sauna unless they are family members. If a Finnish person invites you to a sauna it means that you have been accepted as a friend.

Day 4:

Today was a long but interesting day spent listening to presentations on vocational education and training and the training of guidance and counselling personnel. Some of the presentations lacked relevance to guidance and counselling.

Presentation: Mobi Top Project

The first presentation was about supporting students on vocational placements by using mobile technology. The focus of this project was more about supporting learning than guidance. Unfortunately the speaker did not speak English very clearly and it was difficult to get to grips with the content of the presentation.

The challenges of using this method of supporting students were;

- New competence/technology for teachers
- Purchase cost of equipment
- Not suitable for all vocational areas
- Technology develops very quickly

Presentation: Vocational Training in Oulu College

The college offers 30 vocational qualifications in seven sectors:

Social sciences, business and admin

Natural Sciences

Natural resources and the environment

Culture

Social Services, health and sports

Tourism, catering and domestic services

Most popular areas are Technology, communication and transport which includes building and construction and social sciences, business/admin.

Students have to find their own jobs/placements with employers. Average age of apprentices in Finland is 25-35 years.

Adult education offers vocational adult and further education and apprenticeship training

There is an increasing need for guidance in this area due to competition to find placements.

Presentation: Vocational Special Needs Education & Training in Finland – Merikoski Vocational Training Centre

For students with special needs in Vocational Education studies.

Majority of students integrated into mainstream provision. 13 institutions providing vocational special education and training across Finland.

Focus on employment and quality of life.

Programmes include minimum of 6 months on the job training

Students receive holistic support services

Presentation: Training & In-Service training of Guidance Personnel

Qualification for counsellors for basic and upper secondary, but for universities and polytechnics no law around training but tends to reflect requirements for lower years.

1972 first counsellor training. Training is based around teacher training.

Requirements for student counsellor training:

Vocational teacher training or Masters degree + work as a teacher (min 1 year)

or

Master of Arts (Education) + teaching studies + practical studies in counselling and secondary subjects.

For those who have not done a Masters degree but who are taking a vocational higher level certificate as a teaching qualification, then three years work experience is required prior to teacher training.

Very different training to UK where a degree is not required or a teaching certificate.

Presentation: Training of guidance counsellors in Employment Offices

Employment consultant/education adviser – Bachelor level studies

Employment counsellors – Masters degree in social/educational/behavioural sciences

Vocational Guidance Psychologists – Masters degree in Psychology

Average age of counsellors is 46 – issue regarding new recruits.

Day 5:

The final day. Today we were given the opportunity to compare and contrast issues and features of guidance systems in our own countries. We were divided into two groups and were each asked to present the main challenges facing the guidance profession in our own countries. This gave the opening for some very interesting discussions.

Group Discussion: Some of the issues that emerged:

Ireland – aim to develop a coherent lifelong guidance system. As in England, no provision for the employed.

Estonia – similar issues regarding lifelong guidance provision but also huge inconsistencies regarding qualifications for guidance practitioners and provision. There is no professional body for guidance professionals. Economically, unemployment is very low in Estonia so need for guidance not considered a priority although government have pledged to increase guidance for the employed.

Italy – Citizens not aware of guidance services. Lack of co-ordination. Only guidance in upper secondary schools.

France – Lots of services, good training for counsellors. Similar to England in that guidance practitioners based in centres separate to schools. However services are overloaded, too many demands on the service. Average school counsellor serves 1500 students + unemployed 16 – 25 year olds. Guidance posts are however being reduced. Masters of Psychology required for

counsellors in France, likely to need teaching qualification in future. Lack of quality assurance.

Czech Republic – no lifelong guidance. Services not consistent. Employment service not supportive. Too many changes and reforms but same delivery staff resisting changes.

Spain – 35% 16 year olds don't continue in education. Numbers going to HE declining more opting for vocational route.

It was so interesting to hear the challenges facing other professionals working across Europe. For me the big issue in England is the lack of an all age guidance service. I have questioned this week whether it would be better for guidance for post-16 not in education to be provided by the Employment service rather than Connexions. We have rather an unclear approach for 16-19 year olds outside of education. These clients would perhaps benefit from more specialist support located within an Employment Service. This would allow the Connexions Service as is currently to focus on supporting young people in education.

My other concern for guidance practitioners in the UK is the dumbing down of the qualification level required to practice. Compared to other countries in Europe, our guidance professionals are not qualified to a particularly high level, and there is an increasing mixture of qualification routes. Surely to maintain a credible and respected profession we should be setting a minimum qualification level and compared with our counterparts across Europe, it seems that this should at least be a Bachelor degree in a relevant subject. We do not specify a teaching qualification. I was interested to learn that this is a requirement in Ireland. Is this something that should be considered? What are the advantages/disadvantages of having guidance workers employed by education institutions?

Evaluation against CEDEFOP principles:

CEDEFOP – European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training

Throughout the week we had been asked to evaluate the content of the programme against the CEDEFOP principles of guidance provision. This had proved quite difficult at times, but today we spent some time considering these principles in more depth and concluding the challenges that they present to us as guidance practitioners.

“The CEDEFOP principles are a set of common aims and principles for lifelong guidance provision developed under the auspices of the EU's education and training 2010 work programme. The principles describe the conditions of guidance service that citizens should expect when using such services.”

(CEDEFOP document– “Improving lifelong guidance policies and systems: Using common European reference tools”, 2005)

The four main principles are:

- Centrality of the citizen
- Enabling citizens
- Improving access for citizens
- Assuring the quality of provision for citizens

We broke into groups to consider one of the principles and to debate how it could enable us to become better professionals. Here is a summary of different group discussions:

Enabling clients: services offered depends on needs/skills of individual

Quality of provision: has to be quality assurance system to protect the client and the counsellor. Would like a system that allows development via peer support/sharing of good practice

Access: Improve access for all, not targeting but resource issue. Informing people of services.

Centrality of the Citizen: good in theory but in practice many influences that prevent a truly client centre approach. Practitioners should always work to try and meet the needs of the individual whilst satisfying other demands where possible.

Overall we felt that the CEDEFOP principles represented what guidance services should be aiming to achieve.

Reflections on the week:

Overall the Academia visit for me has been a wonderful experience. I have learnt a lot about education and guidance in Finland but in addition to that I have had the opportunity to compare and contrast guidance systems across Europe.

Finland was a fascinating country to visit, and the varied programme allowed us to experience life and culture in Finland. Our hosts organised the programme extremely well, the days were well planned and they succeeded in organising a

varied programme in terms of delivery and content. The hosts were friendly and approachable and ensured that all of our needs were met.

It was great to have some evening activities organised for the group, which helped us all to get to know one another. I am grateful for the hospitality provided by many of the organisations involved, in particular Oulu Vocational College.

The group of participants couldn't have been more open and friendly and we all came away with new friends and contact across Europe. I have great admiration for those who managed to conduct the week speaking in a foreign language!

On reflection from a personal viewpoint, I would have benefited from a little more time being spent understanding the detail of guidance delivery. We received a lot of information but much of it was an overview and a lot of time was spent discussing education provision as oppose to guidance provision. It would have been great to have had an opportunity at some point in the week to shadow a guidance counsellor and also to have had a smaller group discussion with guidance counsellors working in education and in employment settings.

However, there were 14 practitioners from all over Europe all working in different settings and all with slightly different objectives. With this in mind I feel that the programme served to meet the needs of the group and was successful in providing us with a good insight into guidance and counselling in Finland.

I would like to express my grateful thanks to Careers Europe and the Leonardo Project for providing me with this opportunity. I return home with a pride in my profession and renewed enthusiasm for my work. Thank you