

Academia Study Visit Oulu and Tornio, Finland

20-25th May 2007

Northern Dimension in Guidance and Counselling: Cross-Sectoral Guidance and Networking without Borders

My name is Hayley Spalding and I am a careers guidance counsellor. I currently work in the UK for Connexions Humber in the county of North Lincolnshire (1). The main part of my job sees me offering one to one confidential and impartial careers advice and guidance to young people aged between 13-19 years. I work in two different secondary schools, both of which are in a rural location and both of which have their own Sixth Forms. In addition to this, I offer office-based appointments at the Connexions centre, phone guidance for those that cannot access the Connexions centre and continually work towards the company aim to reduce the amount of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET). Current challenges in my role involve trying to reduce the amount of NEETs whilst work and training opportunities are minimal, remaining positive about the importance of offering specialised careers guidance whilst being encouraged to become a multi-skilled 'generic' adviser and finally, uncertainty about the funding of career guidance services.

In the autumn of 2006, every Connexions Adviser received information about the ACADEMIA exchange programme, which is funded by the European Commission through the Leonardo programme (2). After reading information on the different opportunities and countries involved in the scheme, I decided to apply with Finland as my first choice. My reasons for this were to meet new contacts, to share best practice and to new learn skills I could use in my own guidance delivery.

At the end of 2006, I received confirmation from Careers Europe (3) in the UK that my application had been successful and I was one of 13 participants selected to attend the Finnish guidance exchange in Oulu. My European host - Miika Kekki a Senior Euroguidance Adviser at the centre for international mobility (CIMO) made contact in the New Year and I was soon made aware of fellow participants, given details on the placement and gained an understanding of what to expect during Academia week. About a month before the placement, we were asked to send a brief guide to our roles and responsibilities and asked to familiarise ourselves with a potential learning tool produced by The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) called *Improving lifelong guidance policies and systems* (4).

I arrived in Helsinki on Sunday 20th May, which had been the focus of media attention only the week before due to the Eurovision song contest and last year's winners being Finnish entry *Lordi*. This year's Finnish Academia was being held in Oulu, Finland's sixth largest town 513km north of its capital. An informal get together had been organised by our Academia host – Miika and our Oulu host - Seija Lehto. This was held in Oulu Vocational College, a short walk away from the hotel. This was my first opportunity to meet the other Academia participants and involved introductions and icebreakers to help remember each other's names, roles and where we were from. The whole programme was held in English, so the Irish representatives and I, felt somewhat inferior next to all of these participants from Estonia, France, Spain, Czech Republic, Italy and Iceland who were all using language other than their native tongue to communicate.

Day One:

We arrived at our main meeting place for the week – Oulu Vocational College where our local host Seija Lehto, presented a power point presentation on North Finland and Oulu. We learnt that 5.2 million people live in Finland and approximately 120,000 of these inhabitants reside in Oulu. Aside from the capital, Helsinki, which is home to one million residents, other major cities include Tampere, Turku and Lahti. 92% of people speak Finnish, 6% speak Swedish and the majority of the population can converse in English. The country has 188,000 lakes and forests cover 68% of the land. As a result of this, one of the countries biggest export industries (and employers) is the pulp, paper and paper product industry. The largest foreign trade however comes from electrical and optical equipment. Finland is home to Nokia, which nationwide employs approximately 23,000 staff, this includes over 4000 people working for Nokia in Oulu where the company has several unites in various parts of the city(5). The city of Oulu has good opportunities for study, work and research development. Its two biggest area of employment come from manufacturing, health and social care.

In the second presentation of the day, Dr Helena Kasurinen gave an overview of career guidance and student counselling services in Finland. To comprehend where guidance featured in the education process, we began with an introduction the Finnish Education System (6).

Pre-School Education

Children are entitled to pre-school education one year before they start compulsory education. The idea is to improve children's learning abilities in an environment that encourages independence.

Basic Education

Basic Education is compulsory and it begins in the academic year that a child turns seven. Children at this age start at a comprehensive school where they remain until the age of 16. When children start compulsory education, they begin with attending half days. School holidays are longer than in the UK; Finnish children have a ten week break in the summer.

General Upper Secondary Education and Vocational School

At 16, students have a choice whether they continue in full time general education, enter a vocational style of learning or opt for full time employment. The majority of pupils do continue in education with over half taking up general upper secondary learning and nearly 40% opting for vocational training. Those students that do not meet the entry requirements for either of these choices can continue in basic education for one year to work on their basic skills and career planning. They may also have the opportunity to attend sessions at other educational institutions, visit workshops and take part in work based training opportunities organised by the college training provider to improve their employability.

i. Upper Secondary

Known as *Lukio* in Finland, this style of learning is a continuation of what young people learn in basic education. Students have compulsory courses to study but also have a choice of specialized or applied courses. Most students complete upper secondary education in three years. From this, nearly 50% of students continue onto higher education whilst others move onto further training or employment.

ii. Vocational Training

Vocational training is as it sounds, a more practical, hands-on approach to learning. Students can learn via a full time course at a vocational college or in a predominately worked based environment – an apprenticeship. Students at vocational colleges spend at least six months of their course on

work placements. This is in work areas of their choice where skills are observed through work based assessments. Aside from work experience, students work towards qualifications in topics such as entrepreneurship, global environment awareness and the use of information and communication technology. As with upper secondary education, vocational training takes three years to complete.

University

From upper secondary education or vocational training students can continue onto higher education. They can study for a bachelor's degree at university or apply for a Polytechnic Bachelor Degree through a polytechnic.

From university as with the UK system, students can choose to continue in education and study for Master's Degree and from this a Doctoral Degree should they meet the entry requirements and wish to do so.

Apart from the now familiar notion of equal opportunities for all, Finland offers free education for all. The education system in Finland is almost entirely publicly funded so it is perhaps no surprise to learn that it is the country's second highest public expenditure. This was one of former Education Minister Tuula Haatainen's aims, when in 2004 she was reported as saying, *investing heavily in education and training is a way of maintaining a high-waged, high- skilled economy and competing with the low cost economies of Asia.*

The education system in Finland is regulated by The Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Education. Due to a very recent change in minister (April 2007), Dr Kaasurinen was not able to confirm the current aims and objectives of the Minister of Education, yet did state that there is currently a problem with NEETs particularly amongst the under 25's. This specific issue will be on the agenda in talks with the newly appointed Minister of Education - Sari Sarkomaa in June 2007.

Finnish Guidance and Counselling System

Career guidance counsellors work with students at all levels of their education, in schools, colleges universities and employment offices. Career counselling begins in first grade and continues through decision making in grade nine (when a student chooses between upper secondary schooling or vocational), and the transition from this to further education or work. Guidance is offered on a one to one basis, in small group sessions, through ICT, or distant counselling.

Legislation 1 set by The Minister of Labour states that in comprehensive, upper secondary and vocational education,

- pupils and students are entitled to have educational and vocational guidance during every day at school
- multi-professional cooperation exists

In universities and polytechnics, the institutions must have procedures on how to support students in making individual study plans, taking into account both learning and career management skills.

In Legislation 2, rules aimed at comprehensive education (CE), upper secondary and vocational education, are

- student counsellors take care of vocational and educational guidance (CE)
- cooperation with working life-possibility to have time for work experience (CE)
- guidance and counselling in classrooms, possibility to have personal counselling
- support in learning difficulties

Curriculum guidelines to be met when delivering career counselling include,

- supporting personal growth and development
- promoting the development of study skills,
- checking for signs of personal or social issues
- assisting in plans for the future
- production of educational and occupational career plans
- retaining knowledge of working life and of studying/working abroad
- promoting different tools/skills to aid research

Before the start of each academic year, each region in Finland prepares a strategic plan highlighting the guidance provision to be including in the national curriculum. Each school in that region then makes an operational plan of guidance provision for the forthcoming year. Different agency groups are including in the planning process including, employment offices, social services, youth workers, employers and parents. Throughout the year the plan is regularly reviewed.

Career Guidance Qualifications

To work as a careers guidance counsellor in a Finnish comprehensive or secondary level school, practitioners are required to have a qualification in guidance counselling. A requirement for this training is a Master's degree, plus a teaching qualification from a university. The admission requirement for the course in vocational teacher education colleges is a vocational teaching qualification, plus, one year's work experience in either a vocational school or a polytechnic (7).

In the afternoon of Day One, we had an opportunity to see Oulu city for the first time as we walked through the centre to the Employment Office. Once at the employment office we were assembled in a large lecture theatre and introduced to the service by centre manager Marita Rimpelainen-Karvonen. Employment services are similar to Job Centre Plus offices in The UK. They offer advice on job seeking, career changes, additional careers to boost careers and self employment, plus, information about work and training in Oulu, Finland and overseas.

Employment Offices

Employment offices are part of the European Employment Services (EURES) exchange network of the European Commission. (See Day 2 for more information on EURES) The Labour Policy Strategy for 2003-2007-2010 has a vision that Finland will be *a knowledge based welfare state with employment opportunities for all and that employment services will be reorganised to meet the challenges of the new labour market situation and the changing working life.*

Strategic guidelines and desired affects include,

- Reducing unemployment, current national unemployment figure stands at 6.7%, aim is to cut this by 100,000.
- Ensure the availability of skilled labour – aim by 2010 to integrate young people into working life two years earlier
- Increase entrepreneurship and self employment
- Create an active employment-based immigration policy

Vocational guidance and career planning within employment offices

One of the key differences between Finnish Employment Offices and British Job Centres are the trained guidance professionals that are employed directly by Employment Offices. Named *Vocational Development Services*, Oulu Employment Office employs staff to work in three different guidance specialisms, these are,

- 1) Vocational Rehabilitation Services
- 2) Career Counselling Services
- 3) Services for Youngsters under 25 and without vocational education

Each service is led by a team leader with a mix of psychologists, employment counsellors and educational advisors. To work as a vocational guidance psychologist in an employment office, candidates require a degree in psychology in addition to a guidance qualification. Careers guidance is available to all young people and to adults free of charge. Practitioners work with clients on a one to one basis providing realistic action plans based on their skills, interests and goals. When working with a client, an adviser may use some of the following methods to help their client with decision-making, or to help them search for the right employment or training opportunity,

- psychometric testing
- work placements
- training/vocational school placements
- assessment of learning
- liaising with schools, social services, youth offending etc

In addition to working with registered employment service clients, career psychologists regularly network with local schools, colleges and polytechnics, via twice yearly visits and the sending of fact sheets on job training. They actively participate at recruitment fairs and liaise with careers practitioners working through other agencies.

Reaching the end of Day One, our Academia organiser – Mikki, summarised the day's events and asked us to refer to our CEDEFOP – *Improving lifelong guidance policies and systems* booklet. The evaluation of the day and every day throughout Academia week was to think of unanswered questions and match them to each of the four principles of guidance listed at 2.4 in the booklet, these were,

2.4.1 Centrality of the Citizen

2.4.2 Enabling citizens

2.4.3 Improving access for citizens

2.4.4 Assuring the quality of provision for citizens

These points were written by individuals onto flipcharts, to be accessed at the end of the week. Some of my queries of the day were, how are clients encouraged to train in non-traditional roles, i.e. gender equality policy, what evaluation process is in place for clients and who regulates the guidance services in schools, colleges, universities and employment services? In addition to this, an evaluation of the day was produced in the form of a day by day diary; this was to reflect on specific aspects of each day, relevant and interesting, positive or negative. My own thoughts on the day were after only arriving in Oulu the previous night and then attending an informal get together until 9pm, it was an extremely, long day with a lot of information to interpret and register. The second speaker of the day gave a very thorough presentation on the Finnish educational system, but little time was spent on guidance systems and there was no time left to complete the talk. The employment office seemed an impressive and positive service for the public, however as Vocational Development Service Manager – Marita Rimpelainen-Karvonen did not know what current unemployment figures were for Oulu, nor did she expand on why under 25's were more at risk of becoming NEET.

Day Two:

Tuesday was a very early start as we had to meet the bus at 7.30am. The visit was to West Lapland Vocational Institute in Tornio, a town approximately 93km North of Oulu, geographically in Finnish Lapland but resting on the Swedish border. On arrival at the college, we were introduced to the concept of Cross Border Cooperation, by co-ordination secretary of the scheme- Ritva Nousiainen.

Cross-Border Cooperation

The Bothnian Arc is the curvature of land at the Northern shores off the Gulf of Bothnia Sea. The arc covers cities and towns both sides of the Finnish/Swedish border and is hailed as the Northern most expanding region in Europe. In early 2002 the universities of Oulu and Lapland, Lulea technical university and the three universities of applied sciences (Oulu, Kemi-Tornio and Rovaniemi) published a joint programme with name Bothnian Arc of Knowledge (2002). The programme included the areas to be focused on for joint development. The focus areas were defined as crossing points of business areas and the application areas. The business areas were ICT, metal, forestry, wellness and experience industry. The application areas were spatial development, ICT, transport and logistics, plus environment and sustainable development. The programme leaders devised an action plan with aims to create, the following (8)

- education cooperation,
- virtual education and cooperation (the Virtual Bothnian Arc of Knowledge),
- make joint research applications in European Union framework programmes,
- postgraduate school activities
- joint information office and secretary

Although a relevantly new concept, Ms Nousiainen explained the success of cross-border employment and educational opportunities and announced we would have the opportunity this afternoon to visit a Finnish-Swedish Folk High School in the town of Haaparanta, which is just left of the border and geographically registered as Swedish.

The proceeding talk was a brief introduction to West Lapland Vocational Institute by Principal - Pentti Heikkila. The institute was founded in 1953 and offers places to approximately 2,500 students. It offers secondary level education, further vocational qualifications, specialist vocational education, adult education and apprenticeships. Courses are offered in technology, service, culture and nature industries. This introduction to the Institute was followed by a tour of the campus, facilities, equipment and student accommodation.

The second visit of the day was to a Finnish-Swedish Folk High School in Haaparanta where teacher - Raija Hiivala spoke about the school and what they offered to students in cross-border education. The last presentation of the day was due to be held in the local jobcentre by Lars Kero - EURES Coordinator for the Finnish/Swedish Border, but as he was unavailable today, this talk was held in the Folk High School by Pertti Tikkala a EURES Assistant.

EURES

Set up in 1993, EURES is a cooperation network between the European Commission and the Public Employment Services of the EEA Member States (plus Norway and Iceland). In European cross-border regions, EURES has an important role to play in providing information about and helping to solve all sorts of problems related to cross-border commuting that workers and employers may experience.

In Finland and Sweden, the cross-border partnership started in 2000 and is involved in activities aimed at developing a common labour market in the region, with more job opportunities and cross-border commuting. The partnership is working to: (9)

- obtain comparable statistics on the labour market and the labour force on both sides of the border
- resolve bottlenecks
- establish contacts with industry and potential entrepreneurs in different sectors
- provide information about the labour market to industry, job-seekers and students and information on work experience and living and working on both sides of the border
- encourage small businesses in certain sectors where there are bottlenecks

The last part of the day was a trip to Kukkola Rapids by the Tornio Rivers. A guide at Kukkola informed the group that The Tornio River is the biggest free-flowing river in Europe where salmon and whitefish spawn. Following a guided tour and history of Kukkola Rapids we returned to the bus for the journey back to Oulu.

Some points I noted in my diary from today's events were the disappointment of learning that our guide at West Lapland Institute was actually the careers counsellor. I was impressed by the amount of money spent on college facilities and enjoyed seeing students in their classes, but it would have helped to actually speak to the guidance worker and been told how guidance is delivered in the institute. I was surprised to learn that all student accommodation is free, as is travel for the student to and from the college when they are not in residence. The EURES Assistant that spoke to us was very honest and from listening to all the positives of cross-border cooperation, it was refreshing to hear examples of some of the problems with cross-border working, such as language barriers, different taxation and social security issues.

Day Three:

Main objective of today was to learn how new technologies can aid learning in and outside of the classroom. The meeting place was Oulu Vocational College where Pasi Mattila introduced the *Moop project*. This was a project he managed and was an idea which originated from observing children using their phones (without permission to do so) in the classroom. He decided rather than ban the use of mobile phones in class, he would think of a project where they could be used. This led to the concept of using a mobile learning environment to produce constructive learning.

Moop Project

Mr Mattila describes Moop as an interactive e-learning environment. He has demonstrated its effectiveness with primary school pupils who have used the mobile phone on school trips to analyze their surroundings and to communicate within groups. Through Moop, a pupil makes observations, then saves and manages information in the mobile and network learning platform. Images, sound recordings and visual images can all be sent back to a main network set up within the school.

The goal is to increase interactivity and collaboration in learning with help of a mobile phone. In the Moop environment the mobile learning is realized through tasks based on geographical location and requiring creative problem solving. A camera phone is familiar to most pupils and a meaningful tool for communicating and working. The benefit of a mobile data terminal is that it goes where the learners go (10).

Following this explanation of Moop, we were asked to split into pairs, work with a person that did not speak the same native language and try out the technology for ourselves. Equipped with a list of places to visit and tasks to complete, we had four hours to use the phone as an interactive map, using it to follow instructions and record our findings in the instructed format i.e. photographs, audio, video and texts. Recordings were to be forwarded to the main computer in the college where we would view our collected data later on in the day. The tasks provided an opportunity to visit a range of educational settings including a kindergarten, basic/compulsory education school, upper secondary school and vocational college. The negative side to this was again there were no opportunities to speak to guidance counsellors and out of the six set tasks; three would have been adequate to learn how the technology worked.

The idea itself was innovative and I could see it working in sparsely populated, safe country such as Finland, but in the UK, money spend on educational funding is less, mobile phone theft is high and as the majority of schools in the UK have banned the use of mobile phones, it is an unlikely project to work.

Day Four:

Group met again at Oulu Vocational College, the first speaker of the morning was Pekka Tauriainen. He introduced a project called *Mobitop*.

Mobitop

Mobitop uses mobile phone technology as a learning tool and is particularly useful for students who live and train quite a distant away from the nearest vocational institute or assessor. The project has been funded by the European Social Fund (ESF), Oulu Vocational College and the Finnish Board of Education and was piloted on six students. Students with Mobitop are able to make and receive free calls to other students on the course, teachers and assessors. Picture messaging and video clips can be sent to assessors as evidence of work based competencies. A free software e-learning platform known as a moodle can be used to store students' pictures, texts and daily diary entries. There is also scope to discuss issues with other students in the online forum. Tutors can utilise the technology by group calling the students to discuss issues, set goals and objectives and arrange meetings without repeating information to each individual student. From the pilot findings, challenges of using Mobitop included, cost, the mobile recording of evidence not always being the most suitable way of demonstrating a students' knowledge of the job (i.e. if a student was in a customer care apprenticeship), training staff to use the technology and keeping the technology current in an ever improving industry.

Apprenticeships

The second presentation of the day was by Anne Pudas and she spoke about apprenticeship training. Apprenticeships are offered in conjunction with local vocational colleges. In Oulu, there is only one training provider offering apprenticeship training - Oulu Vocational College, which is where Ms Pudas is based. Apprenticeships are tailor-made to suit the individual and they are free to all, regardless of a persons' household income, age, or previous qualifications. They are offered in thirty vocational specialisms and divided into seven sectors, these are,

- Construction, technology, communication and transport
- Social Sciences, Business and Administration
- Natural Sciences
- Natural Resources and the Environment
- Culture

- Social Services, Health and Sports
- Tourism, Catering and Domestic Services

Students on apprenticeship training schemes receive a training allowance. In the first year of training this is at least 30% of the national minimum wage. After the first year, an apprentice may be offered a contract with their employer and their income would increase to 80% of the minimum wage. In 2006, the most popular apprenticeship sector was social sciences, business and administration, (619 apprentices) closely followed by construction, technology, communication and transport with 584 trainees. This year the college is working with 1128 students on apprenticeship schemes. Due to no restrictions on age, the majority of these apprentices (373) are in the 25-34 age range (11).

Special Educational Needs (SEN)

Quality to Learning Manager - Marjut Huttunen delivered the third presentation of the day on Vocational Special Needs Education and Training (VET) in Finland. There are approximately 10,000 learners in Finland with disabilities and/or learning difficulties. Most SEN students attend mainstream schools although there are state and private owned institutions for those with more severe disabilities. Most SEN students follow a mainstream vocational pathway, so after basic education they would continue with upper secondary vocational learning which would involve at least six months on the job learning to help prepare students for working life. For students with more severe learning difficulties, there are two preparatory courses available,

- Preparatory 1: preparing for VET studies/vocational qualification
- Preparatory 2: preparing for work and independent living

Students also have a third option of an additional year in basic education.

Day Five:

Today was all about evaluating what we had learnt so far this week. On arrival at the college today I discovered we had been allocated into two groups. Our task for the morning was to work in our small groups, to discuss our own guidance systems and raise the challenges faced in our individual roles. We would then share these issues with each other and share any other information we deemed relevant to the discussion. This was a very useful exercise and the first opportunity this week to interact and discuss issues in detail with other participants. Words used to describe the exercise in our group were interactive, useful and empathic. The other group found the exercise amusing, inspiring and passionate. Our college host Seija, clarified some of the queries raised on the flipcharts throughout the week and explained why there had not been much deliverance on career guidance theories and examples of best practice. This was followed by a last look at the evaluation flipcharts we had produced throughout the week. In four small groups we examined one of the four principles of guidance from CEDETOP. We summarised our understanding of our principle and moved around the room, listening and explaining each of the principles to the other groups. This last day proved to be an informal and helpful way of summarising the events, talks and findings of the week. In the final part of the day, we were asked to choose a picture postcard and explain to the rest of the group how our chosen image represented our thoughts of Academia week. Finally we were awarded a Certificate of Attendance by Miika and Seija. The week ended with an evening meal prepared by students at the college restaurant consisting of local salmon and a traditional Finnish dish – Reindeer, although it was only in a soup!

Overall Evaluation

At the beginning of the week, we were asked to write a list of expectations from Academia week. This was sealed and returned to us at the end of the programme. My expectations were,

- to share best practice
- to learn about new technologies in delivering guidance
- to meet new people and gain contacts
- to learn about guidance and challenges faced by practitioners in other European countries

All of my expectations were met, although I would have liked a greater emphasis placed on how careers guidance is delivered and feel I would have benefited from speaking with career guidance workers within the educational establishments we visited. The dissemination style of the guest speakers was on occasions difficult to interpret (even though it was in English) and the full programme left little time to network and collaborate with other participants. To summarise, I found my Academia week in Finland, informative, rewarding and comprehensive. This opportunity through Careers Europe and LEONARDO has provided me with useful European contacts in careers guidance, it has widened my knowledge of European guidance and the issues faced by a range of practitioners and it has increased self-worth in the service that I deliver.

References

- 1) More detailed information on Connexions Humber go to www.connexionshumber.co.uk
- 2) Further details can be found at www.leonardo.org.uk
- 3) More information on this can be found at www.careerseurope.co.uk
- 4) CEDEFOP information can be downloaded in English at www.trainingvillage.gr
- 5) Taken from a report by Sharat Khungar on 'News and views from Oulu' 23/02/07
- 6) This information was extracted from The Finnish Education System as governed by the Finnish Ministry of Labour and of Education, located at www.mol.fi and www.oph.fi. Publication funded by the European Union's Leonardo da Vinci programme.
- 7) Full report (in English) on Guidance in Finland is available at www.cimo.fi
- 8) Bothnian Arc information taken from *Bridging Innovation Systems between Northern Finland and Sweden* by Seppo Saari, Research Director for Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences.
- 9) For more information on EURES go to www.europa.eu.int/eures.
- 10) More information about the Moop project can be located at www.microlearning.org/micropapers and www.edu.ouka.fi/koulut/korvensuora
- 11) Further details on full time courses and apprenticeships at Oulu Vocational College can be found on the college website, www.osao.fi