

## Report on my European Exchange Visit to Germany

The program that I took part in is known as the EU Academia Exchange program. It was based at Mannheim University in Germany, courtesy of Careers Europe and Leonardo.

### **Day 1 (Monday)**

On the first day the group of delegates arrived together to be greeted by the senior professors responsible for the program. They were law lecturers and oversaw the international affairs. To my misfortune, the program administrator was taken ill. As the placement would be entirely in German she was going to assist me with language difficulties. Therefore I was heavily reliant on extracting information from other colleagues who were conversant in German, unlike myself who only had a grasp of the very basics. Each delegate was to provide a brief introduction as to who they were and what they do. There were eleven participants in total.

We commenced with a tour of the faculty. It was very interesting to note that the careers resources were held under the law department. This was due to the heavy regulation of employment and education in Germany. The amount of materials in the careers section was immense and far greater than I had experienced in England. The facilities were quite advanced and technology and space were used very innovatively. An example of this was that the interview rooms were large with microphones and advanced sound systems. They were also split by a window that was blacked out on the side of the adviser and client. On the other side of the glass would be probationers, students or assessors who can observe without intrusion. Naturally, the client's permission would be sought beforehand.

Our next appointment was with the rector of the college. We were given a historical outline and overview of the college's facility, reputation, provision etc.

We discussed and learnt about the German system and how it operates.

Children will attend secondary school a year earlier than we do in the UK. This will finish at year ten, at which point they will decide whether to take on a practical or theoretical / academic path. The next stage lasts three years. If you have chosen the academic option this will take you on to University if you so wish. Up until recent times there weren't too many options if you finished at this point. University was considered a natural progression. This is partly due to the high unemployment levels which place higher demands on those entering the labour market. Education is a lengthy process in Germany and people may find themselves studying for several years further than we do here in the UK in order to compete for similar jobs.

The alternative at year ten would be a three year practical program. Participants need to have found their own employment placement. They would be continually observed as trainees are here in the UK. However, there is an assessment at the very end that would decide whether they pass or fail. At this point the trainees can apply for jobs. Otherwise they would have to continue working towards passing the assessment. Similarly if they don't manage to secure a place after those three years they would go on to do an extra year of vocational job preparation training. This can be in a specific vocational area. Often this extra year would be heavily subscribed with Turkish students due to their German language skills not being to the level of the natives.

### **Day 2 (Tuesday)**

Inspection BIZ (occupational information center),

This is a resource centre for those pupils who will continue on a practical course of study. The students are brought in as a group from the school that they attend for a single period a week. They are accompanied by their teacher as they use the facilities.

An initial briefing was delivered to the group on how to use the resources in the centre. A number of advisers were present to be of assistance to the teacher and the pupils. How motivated the young people are to utilise the resources

does depend somewhat on how well the teacher sells it to them. Upon arrival they are given a welcome pack that consists of:

- a list of the facilities
- instructions of how to use the facilities
- a short book with the jobs available

Nationally there are 630 apprenticeships available.

The young people are encouraged to use the facilities for themselves. They can

- make their own appointments
- use the internet
- fill out on line forms with their personal details
- deal with financial issues

Some interesting facts materialised from the time that was spent in the vocational centre. Certain industries were confined to certain regions depending on the nature of the business. An example is that if you wish to become a brewer it would be in your best interests to move to Munich. Industries are fairly localised in German (as they are in some other areas and countries) such as manufacturing, engineering, banking etc. Looking at financial implications would have to be a priority as a young person's financial position would be a key factor in the path they choose. As well as rent, the emotional strain that comes with moving away is addressed.

After this we were due to have a discussion with the pupils. Unfortunately the supervisor was not available and this did not materialise.

The professional education system  
Klaus-Dieter Tenschert

Orientation days for upper stage pupils with talk  
Study consultation in the occupational picture psychotherapy  
Dr. Mareke Santos-Dot / management Maria Drüner

Unfortunately there was no translation available for these lectures. Some of the German speaking delegates were unsure as to the relevance to our particular roles and program.

For more information on the German Education system:

<http://www.careerseurope.co.uk/exodus/frameset.asp?pagename=welcome.htm>

### **Day 3 (Wednesday)**

We began with a lecture aimed at Guidance professionals on Case Management. Unfortunately there was no translation. After this we spent some time looking at the role of jobcentres locally. It was evident that they are currently attempting to model the jobcentre on the English system. There is a shift now towards the individual's long term job situation and looking at them holistically. Some of the wider issues are being looked at. A professional (similar to a PA) is assigned each client who will assist with moving the person on in their life and overcoming barriers.

The support is targeted and therefore various groups will get greater support according to their circumstances and needs. Those adults below level two are a group that are receiving a lot of investment (similar to the next steps agenda). Parents not in work are also given intensive support, as are people with psychiatric conditions. It was interesting to discover that they use the model used by psychiatric care partners when integrating psychiatric patients back into the community. This model is applied to the long term unemployed or those with barriers and in danger of becoming long term unemployed. The goal is to integrate them back into the employed community. For this end the

jobcentres will work closely with sociologists and psychologists. An action plan will be constructed that will include aspects such as finance. It will start with an assessment and move onto sustained support. This designated member of staff is sometimes called a case manager who will be assigned and stay with the client while they use the service. Previously the emphasis will be on investigating job opportunities but the individual is now given a service that aims to help them become independent and job ready.

Presentation from Luxemburg delegate:

<http://www.careerseurope.co.uk/exodus/frameset.asp?pagename=welcome.htm>

Some of the main points were:

- There are only 11 full time members of staff assigned for the guidance role.
- Trainees get a healthy wage (if they can find work). This is €507 per month for the first year and €666 for the second, with €871 for the third.
- For 3 years after leaving school there is an option of doing vocational education. Once this is finished the minimum salary would be €1570 per month which is state funded by the Labour Ministry

Presentation from Spanish delegate:

<http://www.careerseurope.co.uk/exodus/frameset.asp?pagename=welcome.htm>

Some of the main points were:

- Guidance staff are employed as Civil Servants in the Ministry of Education.
- Compulsory Education goes from 0-6, 6-12 and 12-16.
- Special Education Needs is integrated into the mainstream
- After compulsory school there are two choices which are either academic or vocational. They both last for 2 years. The vocational option includes a 3 month practical placement and can lead to a technical degree program. The Bachillerato which is the academic option is a 3 part exam and can lead onto University. This is normally 5 or 6 years.
- The route into becoming a guidance practitioner is through studying psychology and counselling.

#### **Day 4 (Thursday)**

Today we visited the German cancer research center (DKFZ). The main focus was to look at the professional training and the biological aspects of the labs. There were 3 main centres. The day began with an outline of why the centre was set up and how cancer is affecting the German population.

The apprenticeship scheme is their flagship which hosts 124 trainees. These are 16-18 years old and are involved in direct lab work. They receive approximately 800 applications for 40 places.

One of the major factors involved in selection is the school report in Germany. The potential training provider will look closely at this. It is used as an official document by employers also in the selection process. Information such as the number of hours spent doing various subjects is taken into account. Which school they went to is important. There are 3 types of school and they are:

- Haubshule: vocational, for the less academic (many young people from immigrant families will attend. These pupils will have no chance of getting into the Cancer Research Centre apprenticeship program).
- RealSchule: prepares for the technical and professional jobs
- GrammarSchule: for the more gifted pupils

Due to the lack of jobs in Germany, changes are taking place. The threshold is going up for the requirements of apprenticeships, jobs and University places. This means that chances are generally decreasing, especially for the less able. The Haubshule may not exist in the future as attending this type of school will rule them out of contention for many opportunities.

There is now a shift towards selecting some of the pupils who are academically able but not the elite. For example, employers like the Cancer Research Centre will actively recruit from the RealSchule as opposed to the Grammar School. They are wanting to give opportunities for pupils who may be able, even though they cannot compete with the more talented Grammar School pupils. The retention rate for apprenticeships such as these is almost impeccable. Only 1 or 2 will drop out each year at most (if any) and this will be very early on the program due to genuine misunderstandings. Young people are grateful for training opportunities and will commit to them generally.

Students on the training program will produce a diary which is also counted as a legal document. This is a vital piece of evidence (an enhanced version of a reflective log used in the NVQ). This diary can be used to challenge exam decisions and get a second opinion.

There are specific individuals employed by companies to monitor apprentices' progression and support them. This of course is also the case with the more sophisticated apprenticeship schemes in the UK. The Cancer Centre in particular try to hire young people (early twenties) to take on this trainer / supporter role in order to encourage openness and dialogue with the young people.

Trainees are encouraged to take courses and increase their skills. They normally take English, presentation skills and various others. 50% of the time is given during work and 50% of the course time is taken outside of working hours. Teambuilding is also strongly advocated. English is required in technical roles such as these due to the terminology used.

Not all apprenticeships finish at the same time due to them going at their own pace. This increases opportunities as the finish is staggered and less people are competing for available employment positions.

The morning at the Cancer research centre gave us a very good insight into how the training system is structured and how young people in Germany can advance and become employable. This was followed by a cultural afternoon that included a visit to the local University towns.

### **Day 5 (Friday)**

Friday was wrapped up with remaining presentations, including my own and an evaluation of the week.

Some of the presentations were not in English, therefore I have provided links for further information on local education / training structures for these countries:

France: <http://www.careerseurope.co.uk/exodus/frameset.asp?pagename=welcome.htm>

Norway:

<http://www.careerseurope.co.uk/exodus/frameset.asp?pagename=welcome.htm>

Poland:

<http://www.careerseurope.co.uk/exodus/frameset.asp?pagename=welcome.htm>

### **My final thoughts**

Despite the language barriers, I found the trip to be quite enlightening. The German system seemed to present some advantages and some disadvantages over that in the UK. The training options there are very defined. There is a clear cut path that every young person is exposed to and will follow. They can have confidence that this path will lead them to be fully fledged and qualified for their trade. An example is that even the seemingly unskilled trades are closely regulated. Take for instance the role of a baker. The student will follow a three year program that will outline the occupational requirements at ground level but will also cover the wider social aspects of the role. Importing, exporting, logistics, farming, organics global position of the product, nutrition, the labour market, consumption are all looked at. This is said to give the employee a sense of place in the whole chain. The route is clear and there is an objective path with little likelihood of conflicting advice being given. Courses tend to last for a year, which adds security, stability and consistency. I observed the library information to be individually sectioned with 630 individual sections for apprenticeships alone.

Of course there will be disadvantages with such a rigid structure. It can be very difficult to get things changed as it is so regulated and bound by law. One article I read about the system in Germany implies that it might lack the personal touch and more reflective practice is required. It could also be said that there is a bit of an overkill on the more technical, tangible and practical aspects of the service. For instance the interviewing rooms having microphones and 2 way mirrors for observations, when video or Dictaphone could easily do. The training is extremely exhaustive for areas that may not require it.

From a networking point of view the week was immensely enjoyable and helped me to contrast and compare the way I work in the UK to that of other European countries, especially Germany. It also expanded the world of guidance for me. I would recommend this program highly to anybody in the industry.