

Careers Europe

Academic Visit to Iceland 2007



Guidance Exchange Programme, funded by the Leonardo Da Vinci Programme, organised by the Euro guidance Centre at the University of Iceland

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Contents

Introduction 3

Country Facts 4

Daily Diary

Monday 5-8

Presentations from participants 5 Countries
Presentation on the Education System
Presentation on Labour Market Information

Tuesday 9-10

Presentation from 3 countries
Presentation on Careers Guidance in Iceland IACC
Presentation Career Guidance Education In Iceland
Visit to Ionskolinn

Wednesday 11 -12

Group discussion
Presentation from Intercultural centre
Presentation From Austurbcejarskoli Primary School

Thursday 13

Visit to regional centre for Lifelong learning
Visit to comprehensive secondary school
Visit to primary school Gardur

Friday 14-16

Visit to Service centre MioBcer
Visit to Fjolsmiojan
Visit to Hringsja

Conclusion 17

Introduction

The Academia trip to Reykjavík was organised through Careers Europe and funded through the EU Leonardo programme. It exists to facilitate the exchange of information, ideas and good practice between guidance professionals. I was joined by 12 colleagues from several European countries from 19th -23rd March 2007. The exchange encourages participants to learn about the guidance activities of other countries and primarily the host country and therefore re-evaluate guidance practice within our own countries as well as sharing best practice with participant and host countries.

The focus of this trip was to discuss the changing face of guidance in a multicultural society. The experience also allowed for a greater understanding of cultural norms in different European countries through interaction with other participants.

The following report details the daily programme of activities that the group undertook as part of this exchange.

Country Facts – Republic of Iceland



The first settlers came to Iceland from Norway and Ireland in the 9th century.

Iceland is located in the North Atlantic Ocean, directly east of Greenland, it is Europe's westernmost country, the second largest island in the North-Atlantic Ocean, and a little over 3 hours flight from many north and west European countries. Reykjavík is the most northerly European capital.

Land Area 100,250 sq km (38,707 sq miles)

It's largely an arctic desert punctuated by mountains, glaciers, geysers, hot springs, volcanoes and waterfalls. Most of the vegetation and agricultural areas are in the lowlands close to the coastline.

Monday

We began Monday with introductions and then followed with five country presentations by Denmark, England, Northern Ireland, France and Norway. Some of these presentations are available at www.euroguidance.is/id/1019363. This was followed by a presentation on the Labour Market and education system.

Labour Market

Iceland has a strong economy, low unemployment and low inflation. The Labour Market is broken down as follows:

Agriculture	6.5%
Industry	21.7%
Services	71.8%

Iceland has a population of approx. 300.000, 51% are male and 49% female. Iceland is one of the youngest nations in Europe with a median age about 36 years and 74% of the population is under the age of 50. Working age is considered 16 -74 years however 67 is the average age for retirement. Average working week for full time employed is 47.2 hours. There is extensive migration to the city.

Due to a huge economic boom and development of aluminium production, power plant production and construction in the last couple of years there has been an increased need for labour which has been imported initially from China. More recently due to the extension of the EEA eastern European countries especially, Poland have been supplying the labour force. Current immigration stands at approximately 10%. Much of the immigrant population is Male (70-80%). This is changing slightly with an increase in families coming to Iceland.

Education

The education system in Iceland is divided into 4 levels

Pre-School up to six years of age governed by the Pre-school Act, No. 758/ 1994

Pre-school education is available for all children. Parents contribute financially to the cost of pre-school (about 30%). Pre-schools rarely have children under the age of one and children are not generally accepted to pre-school less than 2 years of age. Children attend pre-schools from 4 hours to a maximum of 9 hours a day.

Pre-school education is intended to bridge the gap between caring for children and educating them, supporting their all-round development and thus preparing them for primary school and life itself.

Compulsory Education – compulsory (primary and lower secondary in a single structure – *grunnskóli*) 6 – 16 years of age. Governed by the Compulsory School Act, No. 66/1995;

The way that this is structured varies from location to location. In some areas the school can be responsible for the ten years of compulsory education in others it can be divided into primary and lower secondary especially in more rural areas where a number of primary schools can be a feeder for the lower secondary. The size of schools varies considerably from between 10 pupils in some rural schools to over 600 in the capital.

The school year is broken down into lessons per week as follows:

Grade 1-4 (age 6-9 years) 30 lessons per week

Grade 5-7 (age 10-12) 35 lessons per week

Grade 8-10 (age 13-15) 37 lessons per week.

The time allocated to subjects is broken down as follows:

Icelandic approx. 19%

Mathematics approx. 17%

Natural sciences approx. 9%

Social and religious studies approx. 10%

Physical education approx. 10%

Arts and crafts approx. 11%

Modern languages approx. 11%

Home economics approx. 4%

ICT approx. 6%

Life skills approx. 2%

Upper Secondary Education – 16 -20 years governed by upper secondary school Act 1996

Anyone who has completed compulsory education is entitled to begin a course of study at upper secondary school approx 90% of those that have completed compulsory have moved to a higher secondary course.

There are different types of upper secondary schools:

- Grammar schools that offer four-year academic programmes of study which conclude with matriculation examinations;
- Industrial-vocational schools, which offer theoretical and practical programmes of study in skilled and some non-skilled trades;
- Comprehensive schools that provide academic programmes comparable to those of the grammar schools and vocational programmes similar to those offered by the industrial-vocational schools, as well as other specialised vocational training programmes;
- Specialised vocational schools which offer programmes of study in preparation for specialised employment.

Higher Education

There are eight institutions of higher education in Iceland of which the University of Iceland is the largest. The others are as follows:

- The University of Akureyri.
- The Iceland University of Education is responsible for education of teachers.
- The Icelandic College of Engineering and Technology
- The Haney Agricultural University.
- The Bifröst School of Business is a private university
- The Reykjavík University is a private institution
- The Iceland Academy of the Arts is a private institution

Icelandic students have a long tradition of studying abroad for their higher education. About 16 percent of Icelandic students in higher education study abroad.

Drop Out

Within the immigrant population there is a very high drop out rate and much fewer start upper secondary level school. The following are some of the factors which contribute to this drop out

- Language is the biggest barrier as the level of Icelandic, Danish, English required to succeed at upper secondary is very high.
- Low Qualification job are readily available
- Demands from parents to stay in touch with home can result in young people missing school
- Lack of teaching materials.

Tuesday 20th March 2007

We began the morning with a presentation on the Swedish System of Guidance. This was followed by a presentation on Career Guidance in Iceland



Careers Guidance in Iceland – IACC

The Icelandic Educational and Vocational Guidance Association were established in 1981 and have at present 250 members.

There is a growing need for guidance in Iceland due to the increased supply of study options and changes in working methods and also the high levels of school drop out. The members work within a wide variety of areas including all levels of education, regional employment service, life long learning centres, companies and private enterprise.

Guidance is quite a young profession in Iceland and the numbers working in the field has increased rapidly and is still developing and undergoing constant reevaluation.

This presentation was then followed by a presentation from Sif Einarsdottir about Career Guidance Education and training

Career counselling and guidance education in Iceland

Careers Guidance and counselling education was brought to the fore by individuals who had studied abroad and brought their knowledge back with them. This began the process of establishing careers guidance in Iceland. The first Careers guidance and counselling programme education was founded formally in 1990 as a one year postgraduate diploma. Which can be expanded in the second year to a masters programme in order to study this undergraduate degree in Education or social sciences or undergraduate degree plus teaching qualification.

Those undertaking the qualification are 90-95% Women, majority are returning students age 30 – 55 mostly teachers.

In the afternoon we continued with two more presentations detailing guidance in Spain and Ireland. This was followed by a visit to Ionskolinn in the centre of Reykjavik

Ionskolinn

The Ionskolinn or upper secondary Vocational College provides much support for the immigrant population especially with their language skills. For those who do not have language skills the college provides a two year integration programme the areas of study covered
Term 1 Icelandic reading, writing and conversation for beginners, computing for foreigners and sports.

Term 2 Continuation of Icelandic reading, writing and conversation, English for beginners, Maths, computing, lifeskills, sports and a maximum of 8 lessons a week from other subject areas within mainstream.

Term 3 Icelandic, reading, writing and conversation, English for foreign students, Maths for Foreign students, sports and a maximum of 14 lessons per week in other subject areas.

Term 4 Support course, Icelandic literature, Icelandic Grammar, Icelandic reading and writing, Icelandic conversation, sports and

English for foreign students with a maximum of 22 lessons per week in other subject areas.

The school has dealt with more than 70 different nationalities. The students range in age from 16 – 60 the average age is 24. They come from dissimilar backgrounds some having gone to primary school in Iceland others who have just arrived.

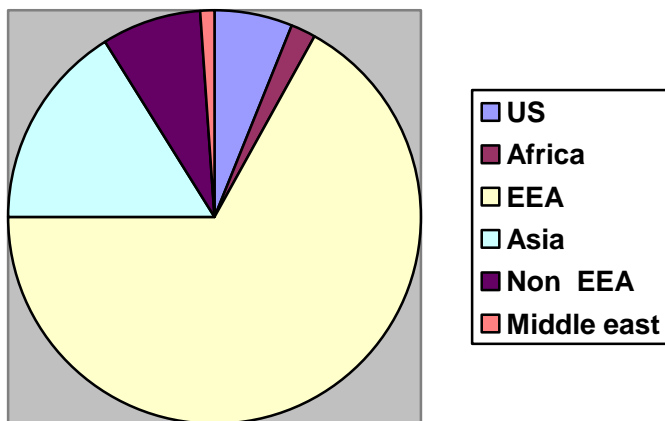
The teaching is conducted in small groups and through individual tuition where required. The teachers have to provide support to different levels of student at the same time. As part of this cohort there are also added duties of providing social support such as application forms and managing the many difficulties that arise from cultural differences.

Wednesday 21.3.07

On Wednesday morning we finished off the country presentations and followed this up with a presentation by the intercultural centre. We were informed about the foreign citizen community within Iceland and the services provided by the centre for this group.

Intercultural centre

The breakdown of foreign citizens within Iceland is illustrated below with 67% coming from the EEA. This has made it increasingly difficult for other groups who would have provided the basis of immigration in the past to obtain work permits. The largest group represented at present are Polish nationals.



General counselling is provided by the centre and there are two advisers who see 50 – 60 people a day. For more difficult cases there is a lawyer who conducts 25 – 30 interviews a week plus 100 queries by telephone or email.

The centre has twelve teachers of Icelandic four employees who are fulltime employees and fulfil demands from health services, Pre-school and schools as well as social services.

The centre works in as advocates with government and other influential groups and is involved in many events including those listed below.

- Cultural Activities
- Festivals
- Language exchange
- Magazine and web page
- Radio discussion
- Interfaith Discussion

The group was then provided with a presentation on teaching a diverse group within primary education

Austurbcejarskoli Primary school

Nina Magnúsdóttir provided information regarding Austurbcejarskoli Primary school. She discussed how the school had adjusted to increase in foreign students. The school opened a receiving department in 1994 available for 6 to 16 year olds. The school caters for 600 children 125 of which are foreign. There are 30 different languages spoken. The children spend 20 lessons per week in the receiving department. The receiving department also deal with parents, teachers and interpreters. If at the end of primary schooling Icelandic is not fluent the young person must go to the vocational college and learn the language.

Following these presentations we spent an hour sharing experiences of guidance within a multicultural society within three small groups. We then presented briefly best practice ideas which can be found here at www.euroguidance.is/id/1019363

Thursday 22.3.07

On Thursday we travelled outside the capital to the peninsula where we visited the regional lifelong learning centre, a comprehensive secondary school and a local primary school.

Regional Centre for Lifelong Learning

“Kvasir” are the Association of Lifelong learning centres outside the capital

There are 9 regional lifelong learning centres outside the capital the first was opened in 1997 and the last opened in 2003. The purpose of the association is to Share experience, Act as a united front with government industry and co-partners. Each centre is independent with its own steering committee. Each centre is managed jointly by the Municipality and the education and employment sectors in the region. The centres act as brokers between those requiring courses and those who offer courses as well as offering a range of courses of their own

The centres provide rural areas with the following resources:

- Short and long Courses
- ICT and Languages
- Recreational Courses
- Staff development courses for local industry
- Custom course for employers
- Study and Career counselling
- Remote University studies and student support.

This was followed by a visit to the comprehensive upper secondary school Fjolbrautaraskoli Suournesja. We were given a tour of the facilities the school provided for a range of students.

This was followed to Gardur primary school where we ere shown the facilities. This ended the academic part of the day.

Friday

Friday began with a visit to the local service centre, and then continued to an industrial training centre and rehabilitation training centre.

Service centre

The function of the service centre is to provide information about local services. They offer social support including courses (lower secondary) for those with little formal education with an emphasis on improving innumeracy and literacy difficulties. Courses are offered to those of 16 and over. There are 6 centres in the capital. Most of clientele are long term unemployed due to the impact that unemployment has on mental health the courses teach learning skill and emphasis building self esteem. The participants get aid to do courses. Rehabilitation is provided for those with drug and alcohol problems. The clientele present with multiple difficulties.

We also learned about the experience of teaching Icelandic as a language. We were advised of the challenges facing those learning the language for the purpose of education. We were told that it takes 1-2 years to learn to speak the language but it takes much longer (6-7years) to use the language and succeed educationally as this requires an individual to grasp, language grammar, meaning and literature.

Fjölsmiðjan, or the 'workplace for young people' is an independent training provider founded in 2001. It provides work experience for disadvantaged and unemployed young people, 16-25 (most are 16-19), and who have previously dropped out of education or are socially disadvantaged. Mr Þorbjörn Jensson is the director of the centre and explained the organisation to us. The centre is based on the Danish model and was started with funding from the Red Cross. Referrals come from a number of services but the young people must be willing and motivated to attend. The average length of stay is 6-8 months but some young people had been there for as little as 3 months or as long as 2 years. It is the young person's decision in consultation with the staff when they are ready to leave. Of those that drop out of the centre mental health/alcohol/drug misuse are the primary cause. These young people can re-access when the circumstances have improved.

The young people partake in a number of activities including the following:

Classroom Work – where students can work at their own pace with support from a tutor, on their maths, Icelandic, Danish and English that will enable them to access the education system again if they wish.

IT Workshop – where students can gain skills in using a variety of software packages as well as real work experience.

Carpentry Workshop – the young people work on a number of projects from summer houses to children's toys.

Automobile Workshop – where students run a valeting service for local people.

Cafe – this was a working kitchen in which the young people could train with a qualified chef. The kitchen catered for all the students at the centre as well as a number of surrounding businesses they served around 80 customers per day.

Recycling – the young people working in this area were working on old electrical goods which had been thrown away. These goods are either recycled or restored and then sold at a local charity shop

New Project - The centre has just purchased a fishing boat which they hope will gain some sponsorship. It is at present not running but they hope to have this next step up and running shortly

The Vocational and Educational Rehabilitation Centre.

The centre started in 1987 and is financially supported by both the health and human services and social affairs departments. The students must be over 18 years and have been disabled due to injury or illness

The centre facilitates 46 students each semester and courses usually last three semesters. The students are taught in groups of between 8 and 18 people, although, individual teaching is provided where required.

The aim of the centre is to enhance each individual's skill to cope in the labour market or in education and to increase independence and confidence.

The educational aim is to update skills in areas such as office skills and service jobs for those no longer equipped for manual labour. The centre offers the following subjects:

Icelandic, Math, English, Book keeping, IT and Visual Arts, Sociology, study techniques, self efficacy, educational and vocational study
Counselling

The centre has a very high success rate with 70% who have graduated now studying or working.

Conclusion

The purpose of the academia visit was to explore the affect of Multiculturalism on Guidance. Due to the economic boom that Iceland has recently experienced it has been faced with the challenges of providing educational and vocational guidance for a diverse group of people. This is a common challenge for each of participant countries and while there are a range of difficulties the largest barrier continues to be language. This is an acute difficulty in Iceland where high standards of Icelandic and English are required to access much upper secondary school provision and as a large amount of literature within the education system is Danish it is imperative to have this language also for academic courses of study. Iceland is proactive in providing language support for the immigrant population but is still faced with high drop out rates within this group.