

Report on exchange visit to Luxembourg

Academia is a European exchange program for vocational guidance counsellors funded by the European Commission through the Leonardo da Vinci programme. It enables guidance professionals from across Europe to visit another country and learn about their advice and guidance systems, enhancing professional skills through experience. Many European countries take part including Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Romania, and the United Kingdom.

Following a successful application to the Academia program last November, I was invited to go to Luxembourg during May 2007.

The aims of the programme included:

- ◆ introduction to the Luxembourg education system and the vocational and social inclusion measures;
- ◆ presentation of the «Centre de Psychologie et d'Orientation Scolaires» (the Centre of Psychology and Educational Guidance or CPOS) and the «Services de Psychologie et d'Orientation Scolaires» (the Psychology and Guidance Service or SPOS);
- ◆ discussions and visits to local institutions and schools to aid understanding.

Apart from myself, there were 5 other guidance practitioners from 4 countries:

Nathalie - France - Paris

Vicky- Connexions Northumberland

Chantalle - France - Paris

Alejandra - Spain - Granada

Suzanne - Sweden - Stockholm

Communication was in French and English, translated by our host, Jean-Jacques Ruppert.

Over the 5 days of the program, the practitioners were introduced to the guidance services of Luxembourg and visited local primary and secondary schools, as well as the job centre, higher education information centre,

vocational training centre and the 'Local Action for young people'. The diary below explains this in more detail.

Key Luxembourg facts:

- ◆ Luxembourg is a small country (2586 square km or approx. 1.5 times the size of Hertfordshire) bordered by France to the South, Germany to the East and Belgium to the West.
- ◆ It has approx. 460,000 inhabitants (there are over 1,040,000 in Hertfordshire), of which 40% are foreign nationals, mainly coming from Portugal, France and other European countries.
- ◆ It is a constitutional monarchy with a Grand Duke as head of state. There is currently a coalition government.
- ◆ There are two main cities - Luxembourg City and Esch-sur-Alzette.
- ◆ Luxembourg is a multi-lingual country with Luxembourgish, French and German being the main three languages. English is also widely spoken and accepted to be the fourth unofficial language.

Diary

Monday

Jean-Jacques took the practitioners to his main place of work, a secondary school (*lycée*), in Mersch (a canton to the north of Luxembourg City). This was to be our work base for the remainder of the exchange. The school at which Jean-Jacques works, the *Lycée Classique de Diekirch* has 3 separate sites.

The Mersch site of the school is a large, new building, which is well resourced. Approximately 450 young people attend the school and are aged between 12 and 15. There are also a number of female boarders. The school has a large gym and sports hall with excellent facilities and the science, technology, IT labs as well as other classrooms were well resourced and immaculately clean.

After a guided tour of the school, the practitioners were taken to a conference room to discuss the Luxembourg education and guidance systems.

Luxembourg Secondary education system

The *education system* is very complicated with various routes that can be taken. At the end of primary school, a decision is made about whether a

pupil will go into the *higher* (classic), *middle* (technical) or *lower* (preparatory) streams. Classic is the academic stream and pupils are expected to go onto university, the technical and preparatory streams are vocational and pupils are expected to go in to trades and less academic professions. The decisions are based on various tests taken in primary school and are based mainly on language ability (Pupils going onto the technical and classic streams would be expected to be fluent in the 3 national languages of Luxembourg as well as English).

Parents often disagree with the decisions and so a panel consisting of the student, the parents, teacher from the primary school, a teacher from the secondary school and a primary school inspector, can then take a vote. The psychologist from the secondary school also has say (although not a vote).

Movement between the streams is very difficult, particularly from the preparatory/technical levels to the classic level, so if a pupil is placed in the preparatory or technical streams, this can exclude him/her from some professions/career routes instantly.

At Mersch, all levels are taught in the same building (this is not always the case) and there are some pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD). There are special schools for those young people with high support needs due to their LDD. Parents can request that their children go to mainstream school but the school takes the final decision.

Guidance System

Guidance is split into different areas and, depending on the advice that is being sought, a student may need to go to different professionals/locations to receive that advice.

Jean-Jacques is a psychologist working in a team of practitioners in a school. His team consists of social workers, guidance teachers, educationalists and his role of psychologist.

He is employed by the Centre de Psychologie et d'Orientation Scolaires (the Centre of Psychology and Educational Guidance or CPOS) which comes under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education. He is, however, based in the school and as such feels more part of it than the CPOS.

Pupils seek guidance and advice for educational purposes including careers advice but also for work experience and learning support. Pupils will self-refer although termly needs assessments are made by the school to ensure that all pupils are getting the correct level of support.

Parents are invited to speak to the team through consultation evenings and these are considered to be very important. If pupils and parents wish, they can access guidance through the CPOS itself.

Most of the team have a psychology background (Jean-Jacques was originally involved in psychiatry), however there are no formal guidance qualifications which have to be undertaken.

For guidance outside of the school, there are various other services which can be called upon. For example, young people may want to access IAG regarding HE. In this case, they would need to visit the 'Centre de Documentation et D'Information sur les Etudes superieur' (Information and documentation centre for higher education). Some young people may want to find out more about apprenticeships, and so a visit to the 'Administration de L'Emploi' (Employment office) would be in order.

This separation of guidance is relatively new in Luxembourg and can make IAG rather tricky as guidance practitioners are supposed to stay within their own remit. Jean-Jacques explained however, that he preferred to have more informal contact with his other guidance colleagues and often speaks to them regarding individuals, rather than sending the pupil straight to other professionals.

Tuesday

The group was taken to see a 'Centre National de la Formation Professionnelle continue - CNFPC' (National centre for Continued professional training). This is equivalent to a vocational training centre/vocational college. It was built with the mission of combating unemployment and promoting continuing vocational training in 1999. Young people and adults attend. The young people who attend the centre do so after they have left compulsory education and have gained a CATP (certificate of education) from the preparatory and technical levels. The centre is extremely large in size and is home to many different vocational workshops from hairdressing to motor mechanics to roofing. Young people who attend can be there up to 3 years and undertake apprenticeships. They can then go onto work if they can get jobs. They get help to find and look for employment. Until recently, all young people who were on training at the centre received a monthly wage of around 500 Euro a month. However, changes in the law have meant that this will now not happen and so the future of the CNFPC may be under threat. Age

restrictions are also coming into practice only allowing 16-18 year olds to study for apprenticeships.

Wednesday

The group was taken to the Centre de Documentation et D'Information sur les Etudes Supérieur (Higher Education Information Centre) which is in Luxembourg City.

As mentioned above, this is the place where young people come if they wish to get IAG concerning higher education. It comes under the Ministry of Higher Education (as opposed to the Ministry of Education which the CPOS belongs to).

People working at the centre aim to provide the best possible information for young people thinking about going onto university/HE. Similar to other institutions seen, the centre is very well equipped with prospectuses/guides/other information from many different countries in Europe and the States. In particular, the amount of publications concerning English universities, such as the Which? Guide and the Times University Guide was impressive and I would not expect to find a much more comprehensive list of publications in an English Connexions library! Young people wishing to go to the centre must make an appointment with a practitioner, who would talk to them about individual institutions and point them in the direction of good quality information. The centre is busiest during the months of June and July.

In Luxembourg itself, there is only one university and it is quite new and small. Many people therefore go to others throughout Europe and the rest of the world to ensure that they get the best choice of course. It can be difficult however to get these qualifications recognised and validated in Luxembourg, so the quality of the information given has to be excellent. This is especially important for teachers of languages, who would have to do their entire degree in the country of the language that they wish to teach.

Clearly, this means that going to university can be very expensive and there are loans and grants available to students each year. Loans of up to 10000 Euro are available. The amount of loan is dependent on the length of study and course content. However, there is no extra help for people with LDD.

Following this, the group was taken to the Administration de L'Emploi (ADEM) (Vocational Guidance centre).

The centre is for both young people and adults who are more interested in vocational careers. It has a number of objectives including -giving information about different vocational areas/jobs, - guidance on a one-to-one basis, -placement onto an apprenticeship.

The guidance practitioners also work in schools with individuals/groups on the lower stream using many visual resources e.g. handouts with a construction site explaining all the different jobs available in construction.

It is a legal requirement for all employers to let the centre know if they have apprenticeships available, so it is another responsibility is for the centre to write to all employers requesting this information. This makes placing a student to an apprenticeship a lot more efficient and productive. Recent law changes have meant that the centre can also work with adults who can apply for the same apprenticeships.

As there are a number of differences between adults and young people undertaking apprenticeships, it can make working for the centre a challenge. Adults are paid through the Ministry of Employment, whereas young people are paid via the Ministry of Education. This means that adults are seen as employees whereas young people are still seen as students and as such have theoretical classes in the afternoons. Adults, as employees are entitled to a minimum wage (more than the allowance that a young person would attract), which along with the additional competition could create difficulties for both young people and adults looking for apprenticeships. However, the government reimburses employers for the additional money paid to an adult to create a more equal playing field.

Unemployed young people/adults are encouraged to come to the centre on a regular basis to try and gain an apprenticeship/employment, and although there is no legal obligation to do this, most do, particularly as there are no benefits available until people reach 26 years of age.

As with the HE information centre, the school and the training centre, the Vocational Guidance centre is very large and well resourced.

Appointments also have to be made.

Thursday

Back at the school, we were introduced to the *Action Local pour les jeunes (ALJ)*. This is another guidance service aimed at those with social or psychological issues who may also be looking for employment. Referrals are made through school, social workers, or through self-referrals. ALJ

offices are found throughout Luxembourg to ensure that they remain 'local'.

Practitioners are able to undertake home visits, and spend time getting to understand the young people and trying to support them in various ways. Their main remit is to listen to the young person and work with them and their families to try and resolve their difficulties. The ALJ's work with families is very important for young people, as if there is no family support, survival can be very difficult due to the fact that there are no benefits available until 26 years of age.

The ALJ can also help with looking for work, by preparing CVs, covering letters and looking for training placements.

It holds WRL day including interview skills and preparation for work. This can include recording mock interviews and then looking at them for improvements.

Many of the young people accessing the service come from the lower ability stream at school. It was explained that out of a cohort of 1000 young people leaving the lower stream, only 400 will move into employment.

Friday

The morning was spent in a small town, Bertrange, looking at pre-secondary educational establishments. School is not compulsory until 6 years old, although the vast majority of children do attend pre-school. Local areas are obliged to provide pre-school opportunities for all. At age 3, children can attend pre-school with the main purpose of learning Luxembourgish - this is particularly important for foreign nationals. From age 4-6, the pre-school is designed to aid entry into primary school and is intended to foster the physical, intellectual and social development of children.

At 6 years old, children move onto primary school. Language learning becomes increasingly important from here on.

German is taught in the first year and then French in the second year with extra help for those children that might need it.

Children who have LDD are integrated as far as possible into mainstream school although there are special separate classes for those that this would not be appropriate for.

As mentioned above, the final year of primary school is very important as it determines which stream pupils will go into in secondary school. Various tests are used on pupils which check for language ability, perception,

visual, motor, numeracy and auto-memory skills. The Cattell-Weiss test is also used before and after Christmas.

Following the visit to the primary school, the group was taken to the town hall and introduced to some councillors, as well as the local hospitality.

Throughout the week, there was also discussion about each of the delegates own country's guidance and education system which made for a lot of discussion about what worked well and that which could be improved upon. Also, it was interesting to note that different countries were very keen on different theories of guidance with a lot more emphasis being placed on testing in some countries. I feel that I learnt a lot from going on the exchange and made useful contacts on a professional level and some good friends on a personal level.

Below are some general observations and conclusions which stood out for me:

- ◆ Luxembourg is a small country with a high population density, similar to many areas of England
- ◆ Language ability/aptitude is fundamental when considering education, employment and training. In order to have the best chance, it is essential to be fluent in Luxembourgish, German, French and English.
- ◆ Resources, both in staffing and physical building & equipment are excellent
- ◆ Education is extremely important and very selective with streaming from a young age
- ◆ Guidance is available through many different channels which can mean interagency working is more difficult, but does allow for practitioners to be experts in their field
- ◆ There are no formal guidance qualifications
- ◆ Psychometric testing is an important feature of guidance
- ◆ Apprenticeships are widely available and an important part of the education/employment system.
- ◆ Family support is key in the successful transition from school to employment, further education and/or training.

