

Report

ARION STUDY VISIT: April 15 - 19 2002
THEME 12: Innovation in Language Teaching
VISIT 8: Irvine, Scotland

HOSTING ORGANISATION: North Ayrshire Council
Educational Services
Mr Colin Laird, Senior Advisor

GROUP MEMBERS:

Name of participant	Country
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Considering the guidelines of the Socrates, Leonardo & Youth Technical Assistance Office this report concentrates on the following aspects of the Study Visit::

- organisation of the Study Visit
- comparison of educational systems under European dimensions and suggestions for solving problems
- innovation in foreign language teaching within the European dimension
- envisaged contacts between delegates and the visited schools
- school visits

Organisation of the Study Visit

The detail and clarity of presentations was much appreciated by delegates. The presentations ensured that there was a clearer focus for the visits to the various schools. All delegates have been provided with transcripts of the presentations for future reference.

There was a high level of discussion and questioning following the presentations. All responses were dealt with and there was an indication given by the speakers that they were keen to learn the practice in the countries presented by the delegates as well as to share information about the Scottish system. The thorough briefing session every morning set a high tone for the following visits. Lunch times enabled delegates to get to know the Scottish colleagues who were able to join us. Around the table there was much discussion about the education systems in the countries represented. These focused on where there are similarities and differences and judgements on how other systems might be made to work in our own countries. There was social conversation too and overall the lunches were very much in the spirit of the Arion Project.

The organisation has been excellent with transport arranged and visits well timed. We often became so involved in the discussions with fellow professionals that time passed all too quickly. Delegates were very impressed with the efficient organisation and credit for this goes to Colin Laird and his colleagues in the Educational Services.

Comparison of educational systems under European dimensions and suggestions for solving problems

The delegates were given a detailed picture of the Education in Scotland which enabled them to compare this system with the systems in the various home countries. These presentations on Education in Scotland in general and the teaching of modern languages in particular showed that the Scottish system is significantly different from the English system in spite of some similarities. The North Ayrshire Council - one of the 32 Local Authorities in Scotland which are in charge of Nursery Schools, Primary Schools, Secondary Schools and Community Education - is responsible for 139 000 inhabitants and spends 50 % of its budget on education. The local authority is in particular responsible for the employment of teachers and other staff, for the school buildings, books and materials. Within the national guidelines they are also responsible for the curriculum in schools. The Scottish Executive Education Department is directly responsible for Colleges of Further Education, the Colleges of Higher Education and the Universities and has overall responsibility for education in Scotland.

Much effort is put into developing curricula, setting up support systems for groups with special needs e.g. Councils Psychological Service for pupils with special needs which provides lingual support for children with other than the English language, supports teacher training, etc. Impressive are number and variety of international links. The list of countries and cities includes: Norway, Finland, Sweden, Germany,

Netherlands, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Greece, Italy, France, Spain, Portugal, Ireland, Canada, United States (Michigan, Chicago, Atlanta).

Innovation in foreign language teaching within the European dimension

The number of economical and personal contacts within Europe will increase and so will the demand of people with foreign language qualifications. In 1998 the Scottish Office Education and Industry Department established an "Action Group of languages" to raise the awareness of teachers, parents and pupils of being citizens in a multi-lingual world. One result of these efforts was the *Entitlement*, a programme which offers at least six years of learning a foreign language (500 hours). The Department of Education provided funding for LAs including a "Languages Innovation Fund".

In North Ayrshire which has a higher uptake of languages (37%) than the national average (11 %) innovations take various forms:

- technology related teaching
- twilight teaching of less commonly taught languages such as Finnish, Norwegian, Catalan, Mandarin etc.
- earlier starts to language teaching
- residential events like film making in a foreign language
- Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for teachers
- materials production
- parent and child learning initiatives (very popular for Spanish)
- native speakers in primary classrooms (language assistants)
- encouragement of foreign language teaching in nurseries

All these initiatives have to be seen in the context of French still being the most popular language in Scotland's schools with Spanish in second and German

in third place. Italian being hard to "sell" and there are difficulties in recruiting teachers of German. There have been positive reports from inspectors as to the effects of all these efforts. The latest numbers and results will be received by August 2002. At the university level more students should be encouraged to study languages and become qualified language teachers

Quality Assurance plays an important role in the Education System. In 1966 the LEAs developed quality controlling: Inspectors observe schools and give a detailed feedback. Advisors help schools in developing their own curriculum and in selfevaluating their work. Each colleague within a school takes part in planning the school development. This plan will annually be submitted to the Director of Educational Services.

The National Guidelines for Modern Languages set clearly defined goals for the various levels and offer some advice on assessing language performance. The grids of strands and attainment targets identify the key ideas and skills that pupils will develop. Levels provide help to indicate the progression. Section 5 of the National Guidelines gives very useful advice for the Teaching of Modern Languages

The required language learning concepts will benefit from an intensive exchange of ideas from an intensive exchange of ideas across countries. The THRESHOLD LEVEL and other publications of the European Council have already had their impact. Knowledge about education systems in other European countries will help to spread innovative approaches

Envisaged contacts between delegates and the visited schools

Delegates have exchanged addresses of contact persons at various schools in order to arrange Student exchanges. Depending on a suitable financial support an Italian group of students would like to attend a two week course at the James Watt College of Further & Higher Education, Scotland's largest College. A German teachers' centre considers the opportunity to send a teacher student to the James Watt College for an internship. There were enquiries concerning an exchange of teachers over a considerable period of time.

School visits

The visits to the classes were well organised. Delegates saw different age groups. The pupils were active and engaging throughout the schools. They demonstrated their language skills and also their skills in music, singing and dancing. Delegates were able to look into the books, talk to pupils about their work. The visited schools were of high quality with dedicated staff and managers. After having been in classes delegates often had coffee and tea in the staff rooms and were joined by several members of staff and the head teachers. Informal discussions about the schools and education in general were held. Head teachers and colleagues created an excellent atmosphere for the visits. Exchanges with pupils and staff were ideal and certainly in the spirit of the Arion Project.

Final note

We were in a very hospitable area in Europe and the North Ayrshire Council did the very best to make this Visit an outstanding experience.. We did not only have very impressive experiences during the days we also enjoyed entertaining evening events as there was a remarkable *Civic Reception* and a most wonderful *Arion Visit 2002 Scottish Evening*. As our group remained together most evenings we had continuous discussions of education issues. We derived great pleasure and learned from each other. We exchanged information about our own education systems and of the lives we lead within our different cultures.

Finally, my thanks to all the delegates who have contributed for this report. I hope that I have represented our views accurately.

Gerhard Burzer

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