

Visit to University of Limerick, Ireland, October 9 -12, 2016

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The Department of Education (EDU) has had a bilateral agreement for student and teacher mobility with the University of Limerick (UL) for a few years and we have had the opportunity to welcome researchers from UL as well as send our researchers to UL several times. During such a staff exchange when a professor visited EDU to teach seminars and discuss further cooperation with our researchers in the fall 2015, we also discussed that student mobility and other possibilities of student exchange, such as placement studies at Irish upper secondary schools, should be improved. It was during that visit that our guest from UL invited us to UL to explore possibilities for further cooperation at the student level.

Since we only had time for a relatively short visit, two days at UL, we needed to carefully plan what we wanted to achieve at UL. One of the issues we prioritized was the possibility of sending Swedish students enrolled in our teacher training programs to Irish upper secondary schools for school placement studies (in Swedish “VFU”). As most of our students who do their placement studies in other countries do this at Swedish schools, we also want to be able to offer our students a teaching experience at national schools. For this purpose we wanted to get in touch with headmasters and teachers of one or more Irish schools in order to establish such a cooperation and to further discuss how students' performance would be assessed, how they would be supervised and examined. But we were also interested in discussing an increase of the number of student exchanges, courses available in Education Sciences and Human Resources for our students, as well as exchanges at the Master's and PhD level. After several e-mails with colleagues at UL we agreed on a program and date for the visit.

Getting to Limerick may take some time, especially if you happen to take the “wrong” bus from Dublin to Limerick. Our bus ride took more than four hours. This is a distance of about 200 km that the other “Express” bus usually covers in two hours. Our bus drove through all small villages, stopped for countless times, waited at these bus stops until the bus driver, a very friendly, chatty and helpful person who seemed to know everybody who got on the bus, was certain that really everybody got on the right bus. This bus driver also made sure that we got off the right stop and directed us into the right direction of our hotel in Limerick. Quite an experience.

The next day we met with our colleague at UL who introduced us to teachers and the head of the department. We also had the chance to meet a colleague who is involved in the course “micro-teaching” and digital resources. Before students do their placements studies at local schools they have to complete a course in micro-teaching where groups of about 6-8 students plan and film their teaching on campus and later view these films to analyze and reflect on their teaching. They also

learn how, when and if at all to use digital resources for what purpose. The course is very successful, though quite expensive, and students at UL are very pleased and well prepared for placement studies at local schools. This meeting was quite instructive and we hope that one of our colleagues involved in classroom management will have the chance to visit UL to learn more about this.

Before continuing with our discussions, a student gave us a guided tour on campus. We were very impressed by the campus which is very similar to American campus. We were amazed by the facilities and the artwork on campus. We heard that almost all students live on campus (it's about 5km to the city) and generally are pleased with the service and cultural life on campus.

Unfortunately, later in our discussions we learned that the agency equivalent to the Swedish National Agency for Education makes nearly impossible a student exchange for students enrolled teacher training programs, since credits received at other international (non-Irish) universities cannot be transferred. We also learned during a visit to a local school where we held a presentation about the Swedish educational system to 16-year old students that local schools are quite overwhelmed by the number of Irish students they have to receive for school placement studies. Thus there was not really an interest in establishing a cooperation with EDU for placement studies.

Although we realized that we would not be able to increase the number exchange students and probably not succeed in establishing contacts with local schools we discussed other possibilities of further cooperation. We agreed that an exchange at the Master's and PhD level would be easier to facilitate and that summer or winter schools might be a good opportunity for exchanges. UL will organize such a winter school in January 2017 and invited our researchers and doctoral students.

Despite the fact that we did not achieve what we had planned to, this visit was quite informative and useful. We know now that we need to work on a better exchange at the advanced level – the winter school is the first step – and that we have to turn to other partner universities outside the UK and Ireland to investigate possibilities for school placement studies at local schools