



Dear IAESTE alumni

I am pleased to be issuing the third edition of our IAESTE UK Alumni Newsletter, **directions**. A particular welcome to all new members to the group and please remember that we are always eager to hear from past trainees, whether it be reflections on your experiences on the programme or on how travelling and working abroad affected your careers and life directions afterwards. In this edition we have featured one story of the repercussions of an IAESTE placement in the story of VJ, a trainee at Imperial College in 2003.

Most of our international trainees have now arrived safely in the UK. Similarly, all but a few of our British students are now abroad, in countries ranging from Mongolia to Ecuador, Iceland to Kenya, and some 50 others inbetween. I am pleased to report that some of our alumni have helped arrange new placements this year such as at AMEC Upstream Oil and Gas in Aberdeen, OFCOM in London and at the universities of Strathclyde and Heriot Watt. I hope to feature a few of these as case studies in our next edition and encourage more of you to take on the role of IAESTE employer.

I wanted to add a reminder for those of you interested in getting in touch with trainees from other countries whom you met years ago on IAESTE placement. You may find them through IAESTE's international alumni network, the *Friends of IAESTE*, which can be found at www.iaeste.org/friends. *Friends* is a web-based database and to become a member you will need to log on yourself and subscribe. There are no fees, just access to other members and receipt of a quarterly newsletter. If you don't wish to subscribe to *Friends of IAESTE* but would like us to search for someone you met in the past just let us know and we'll see if we can find them!

Christina Vakomies
IAESTE UK National Secretary

directions



86 countries, 6000 trainees, happening now

August is the time of year when IAESTE staff and volunteers around the world can sit back on their laurels and savour their successes. The placements have been arranged, the troubleshooting is over – as with cancelled placements, visa problems, the usual array of obstacles one encounters when managing a mobility programme – and the majority of this year's students are undertaking their traineeships.

This year IAESTE UK have arranged in excess of 200 placements in the UK for trainees from 60 countries and sent 180 UK students to 54. The wonderful thing is that these days, with the benefit of e-mail, we can hear from them while on placement. We have been enjoying reports from places as diverse as Turkey and Tajikistan, and our favourite, the regular updates from 'Dario in the Jungle' in Ecuador.

Meanwhile, throughout the UK our international trainees are hard at work. But they still take time to participate in the social programme arranged with visits to places like Edinburgh, Bath and the Lake District. The 80 trainees based in Northern Ireland have been to the Mourne Mountains, Donegal, the North Coast and have also met up with the IAESTE students in the South for a weekend in Dublin. The highlight of the programme in Northern Ireland was a reception at the Stormont Parliament buildings hosted by the Permanent Secretary for Employment and Learning.

In London, trainees and their employers were invited to our annual reception at Imperial College (*see photo of trainees, above*). On that occasion one of the students, Garrett Schmid, a Canadian from the University of Regina in Saskatchewan, addressed the crowd with a few words about his experience working at Hyder Consulting Ltd: 'When I arrived in the UK it didn't take me long to realise how fortunate I was to be selected as an IAESTE trainee ... apart from the academic development I've achieved through working at Hyder, my overall awareness of the international community has expanded through meeting other IAESTE trainees like myself. All of these benefits ... have been possible with the support of employers here today On behalf of all the trainees I would like to give my sincerest gratitude. Not only have you given us insight into our career directions but also allowed us to develop into individuals with a greater awareness of the world.'

General Secretary meets UK's earliest alumnus

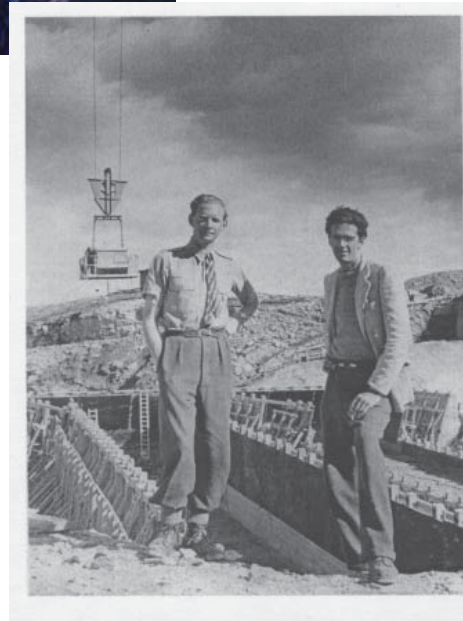
In the last edition of **directions** we featured some of the responses we had received from alumni of Imperial College who had been on the IAESTE programme. Amongst these was Frank Leighton, our only registered member who went out in the inaugural exchange year, 1948. Now retired and living in Vancouver, he has written a book of memoirs which covers his experiences as a trainee in Switzerland.



now had member organisations in 86 countries. And he was surprised to hear that now all trainees, as well as undertaking paid professional and scientific work, were normally met on arrival, benefited from reception and social programmes, and generally expected a high level of service from the programme. Frank's comment was that he had been very surprised to receive the added bonus of a pay packet for his work at the end of his placement in Switzerland. Students are far more demanding customers now!

By coincidence, the General Secretary of IAESTE, Pauline Ferguson was in Vancouver this July so we arranged a meeting between her and Frank Leighton. Pauline spent a pleasant summer evening visiting the Leightons' West Vancouver home, high on the North Shore overlooking the Lions Gate Bridge, learning about what it was like to be a young engineer just after the war.

Frank was originally scheduled to work in Czechoslovakia but these plans collapsed when the country became a Soviet-style state. James Newby, the founder of the IAESTE programme based at Imperial College, arranged an alternative placement for the civil engineering student on a dam site in the Swiss Alps. Frank was pleased to learn that the programme had grown to have exchanged over 300,000 students and



Above Frank Leighton in 2004, with IAESTE General Secretary Pauline Ferguson in Vancouver.

Left Frank in 1948 at the St Barthelmy Dam site, Switzerland. Fifty-six years between the two photographs, yet Frank has hardly changed at all!

... and we keep hearing from Imperial College alumni

In the Imperial College alumni magazine *Imperial Matters* there was an article on IAESTE. It sought contact from those who had made vacation work experience placements abroad through IAESTE.

I am one such. I studied for a BSc (Eng) in civil engineering at Imperial in 1953-56. At the end of my second year, in July and August 1955, IAESTE arranged for me to work in Sweden for its largest civil engineering contractor, AB Skånska Cementgjuteriet of Stockholm, on their contract for re-aligning a portion the main road (and European route) between Stockholm and Trondheim (Norway). This was the Stavre-Grimnäs contract located 300 miles north of Stockholm in Jämtland province.

In those days, James Newby ran the Imperial College vacation work scheme and made all the IAESTE placements from, and to, the UK. It was a firm condition that we may not seek an overseas placement through

IAESTE until we had obtained adequate experience in UK. This I had obtained in 1954 on a power station foundation contract in Derbyshire on the staff of the Resident Engineer.

As a matter of interest, I made a private arrangement with a director of AB Skånska Cementgjuteriet to work for them again in Sweden in 1956 after I had graduated. This I did for 9 weeks before returning to UK to undertake my deferred National Service as a subaltern in the Corps of Royal Engineers.

After a lifetime in the profession, I am now age 70 and retired.

Kind regards

Adrien J G Sturgeon
B Sc (Eng), C Eng, MICE, MCI Arb

The Tajikistan Connection

'When the IAESTE programme offered me an internship in Tajikistan, my feelings were mixed. It is just above Afghanistan, a region that is still recovering from war, and the travel guides told me stories that would normally deter the ordinary traveller! However, having never visited Central Asia before, I was keen to explore this part of the world and with the support of my friends and family, I decided to accept the offer. My reasons for applying to Tajikistan were: a possibility to work with an NGO and gain valuable work experience; help people; learn about their culture, religion and way of life; and most importantly, to visit a region I had only heard about in the news.'



Varun is gaining experience in micro finance and reporting, travelling to many different areas to interview the local inhabitants. He is one of two UK students placed at ACTED, the other being **Richard Kirk**, a civil engineering student from Queen's University Belfast, who this summer is also travelling through rural areas on a project related to ACTED's installation of water pumps in over 70 villages in the province of Khatlon. Both students have made it clear that the treatment they have received and the quality of the placements are high; as Richard says:

'From the beginning of my placement with ACTED Tajikistan I have been warmly welcomed and made fully aware of the responsibilities I carry during my employment period. I have been given a sufficient amount of time to familiarise myself with both the project I am involved in and my new surroundings. ACTED have supplied me with adequate and conclusive project information which has helped me to build up an understanding of the background and purpose of my work.'

The words of **Varun Sarda** are typical of the 21st century IAESTE trainee. An environmental engineering student at Imperial College, Varun was keen to take up a placement with the French international development agency, ACTED, which has several projects in Central Asia. Whereas a placement in Spain or Portugal or Switzerland was once enough of a challenge for students, now they are looking to gain technical experience in countries such as Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Peru or Tanzania. In its early years the IAESTE programme was primarily Euro-centric but member organisations now extend to over 85 countries. In the past IAESTE was one of only a few means for students to travel within Europe for work experience; now there is a range of mobility programmes, free movement of labour throughout the EU, and university and company schemes encouraging students to work or study in another European country. By contrast the opportunities IAESTE provides in the developing world are unique and growing in popularity amongst programme applicants.

One of the primary reasons we are keen to develop our exchanges with Tajikistan is our confidence in the level of care provided to our students by our colleagues at IAESTE Tajikistan, which this year included arranging a meeting in July for our trainees and the Deputy Head of Mission to the UK Embassy. In 2004 we have exchanged three placements with Tajikistan, receiving two agriculture students as trainees to McCracken Farm in Northern Ireland and Sir Harold Hillier Arboretum in Hampshire, as well as a computer science student to Bristol University. The third UK student is on placement with MMK, a drinks manufacturer near Khojand.

Thomas Dunstan, a mechanical engineering student from the University of Strathclyde says of his placement in Tajikistan:



At the UK Embassy in Dushanbe Left to right: Alisher Faromuzov, IAESTE Tajikistan; Thomas Dunstan; Madina Rakhmanova, Embassy Press Officer; Richard Kirk; Margaret Belof, Deputy Head of Mission; Varun Sarda; Professor Pulatov, National Secretary, IAESTE Tajikistan

'I knew nothing about the place six months ago, and up-to-date information about Tajikistan was difficult to find in the UK. So it was a nice surprise, while being shown around the capital, Dushanbe, not to find ourselves in the lawless dustbowl we had been told about. Tajikistan seems to have come a long way since the mess of the civil war and I have found it a relaxed and friendly place to be.'

IAESTE placement leads to competition final

Vijeprathap Vijendranath, a computing student from the University of Pretoria, found that his placement in the UK in summer 2003 was just the first step towards an exciting international challenge. VJ, as he was known to the IAESTE team in London, spent 8 weeks working on a project for the Department of Medicine, Imperial College, based at Charing Cross Hospital. He was working with elderly patients testing a range of electronic aid systems developed to detect falls. VJ felt some of the devices being tested could benefit from further development. With the help of his supervisor, Dr Miskelly, VJ got the opportunity to develop an idea for a system called Intelligent Elderly Care (iEC), which can detect falls reliably and efficiently using CCTV. The system uses a camera attached to the corner of the room where the elderly person lives, and feeds video images to a computer. By use of pattern recognition the computer is able to identify falls and alert a nursing station immediately. The advantage is that the elderly needn't wear any devices and nurses do not need to provide continuous monitoring.

VJ returned to the University of Pretoria to work on his project further with a team of undergraduates and then entered the idea in the 2004 Computer Society International Design Competition, which had the appropriate theme *Making the World a Safer Place*. iEC was short-listed as one of the top 10 entries and VJ's team got the opportunity to travel to Washington DC to present the project to the competition judges. Although VJ's team did not win one of the top three prizes, the judges comment on the entries was that 'not only did these students prove to be amazingly skilled artisans of computer systems, they also showed they understood how their work fits into the broader context of our societies. This is no small feat and it reflects great credit on them and on their respective universities.' VJ's experience demonstrates the ripple effect of an IAESTE placement, as the outcome has been for a wider group of students at his home university to become involved and benefit from the international exchange of ideas, all based on VJ's initial 8 weeks of work for Imperial College. A proposal is now being put forward for VJ to return to Imperial College to carry out a further three years of research and development on iEC.

Below The iEC system team, with Vijeprathap Vijendranath, far right.



How you can help IAESTE

As an alumni member, there are many ways in which you can help IAESTE UK. These include:

- **becoming an IAESTE employer**
Join the increasing list of companies and academic institutions that benefit from having a foreign trainee during the summer months. At the same time, be safe in the knowledge that you have provided an opportunity for a British student to go abroad.
- **providing accommodation for a foreign student**
Foreign trainees who visit the UK are usually housed in university halls of residence, flatshares or with host families. However, finding such accommodation often provides a major headache. If you can help, please get in touch.
- **promoting IAESTE to others**
If you work in an academic institution you can promote the IAESTE programme to undergraduate students by displaying posters, distributing leaflets and arranging a presentation.

IAESTE UK contact details

Christina Vakomies

National Secretary

T 020 7389 4771

e christina.vakomies@britishcouncil.org

Bruce Wicks

Senior Programme Officer

T 020 7389 4114

e bruce.wicks@britishcouncil.org

Diane Gill

Programme Officer

T 020 7389 4774

e diane.gill@britishcouncil.org

Neil Martin

Programme Officer (Northern Ireland)

T 028 9024 8220 x 230

e neil.martin@britishcouncil.org

www.iaeste.org.uk



IAESTE UK is managed by the British Council, the UK's international organisation for educational opportunities and cultural relations. The British Council is registered in England as a charity.

