

NEWS

PROJECT

NextGen Microcities -
Next Generation Micro
Cities of Europe

📍 Ventspils & Valmiera,
Latvia

TOPIC

Jobs and skills in the
local economy

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NextGen Microcities boosts career development guidance

See on UIA
website



There is much that can be done to support employability, and public administrations can play an important role in that. They can do so not just by designing effective policies, but also by helping the labor market system to become more efficient and effective in closing the gap between demand and offer of qualified jobs. In this article we present the online career education support tools that NextGen Microcities has developed in the context of this UIA initiative.

The future of work relies on the ability of our local ecosystems to generate both job opportunities and employability.

Employability designates the ability of finding, fulfilling and keeping work (whether employed or independent is irrelevant). Knowledge, skills and competences have to be maintained and refined in order to keep pace with the constantly changing outside world.

To reach this goal in today's constantly evolving labor market, it is not enough to graduate with the knowledge and skills needed for a start in the individual professional life. The graduate should dispose as well of the ability to reflect on experiences, perspectives and to link those with the constant enhancement of her/his individual competences in order to progress and successfully cope with change throughout his/her working life. It is therefore as much a matter of hard / technical skills, as of soft skills and personal characteristics and attitudes.

There is much that can be done to support employability, and public administrations can play an important role not just by designing effective policies, but also by helping both the education and labor market system to become more efficient and effective in closing the gap between demand and offer of qualified jobs. This is well the case of the NextGen Microcities UIA project, which is launching a set of integrated initiatives for career development guidance and support.

Career development activities are essential nowadays. As a result, people understand potential education and work paths and choices better, and therefore they are more motivated to acquire skills, qualifications and occupations. It allows people to achieve better results in the labor market and more easily switch from education to the labor market. Besides, there are more of those who choose the in-demand and knowledge and technology

based further education and professions. It also reduces the number of early school leavers.

Career education is a crucial element in career development, as it sets out functional career paths from early stage of career development: the transition between education and work. This is the focus of this article, as NextGen Microcities recently launched from Valmiera an online platform with tools to support educators in providing career guidance to youngsters. But let's take it one step at a time.

In Latvia career education is a recent development, whilst it is a normal element of education in many European countries. Five years ago, a comprehensive strategy was developed with the belief to support young people from kindergarten to adult life in understanding the evolution of the labor market and their place in it.

At present, Valmiera is the only city in Latvia that has produced such a strategy, which was the result of an articulated benchmark study on other countries, coupled with a consultation process. The strategy includes a plan of activities and investment provisions, and it promotes specifically the importance of STEM skills and education (which will be the focus of the next Zoom-in on the project).

The overarching goal of Valmiera career development support is to promote and develop the career management skills of Valmiera residents. From the overarching goal three key objectives derive, each expressed as performance indicators to be achieved by 2021 and 2022. The three key objectives of the Valmiera career development support are the following:

- Good quality educational institutions that are competitive in Vidzeme region and Latvia;
- Educational opportunities according to in-demand skills and professions;
- Professional, informed, educated and supported human resources or implementation of consistent, comprehensive and long-term career development support activities in Valmiera.

In order to achieve the stated objectives, there are a total of eight action lines identified according to Gatsby's 2014 benchmarks^[1] for providing good career guidance. Each activity line includes a set of specific complementary measures or actions. The career development support actions are the following:

- A stable careers programme;
- Learning from career and labour market information;
- Addressing the needs of each pupil;
- Linking curriculum learning to careers;
- Encounters with employers and employees;
- Experiences of workplaces;
- Encounters with further and higher education;
- Career counselling (personal guidance).

The developer and implementer of the career development support strategy is Valmiera's Development Agency in close cooperation with Valmiera's Municipality Department of Education and educational institutions.

Within the overall strategy, NextGen Microcities provided the opportunity to fund and launch in November 2020 an online tool with freely available resources for career education. The main target audience of the tool are Educators and Teachers that work with young people. The tool can be accessed at this link:
<https://karjerasmateriali.lv>

At present, the main specialist in career development support at the general and vocational education establishments of Latvia is the educator - career counsellor, whose main partners are school management, other teachers, school support staff, school council and student self-government, as well as other cooperation partners outside the educational institution, including private sector representatives, government agencies, etc.

A survey was conducted in order to understand practical needs, and the results showed the existence of national resources available, but often the information included in these resources was outdated, or too narrowly focused. The survey therefore revealed a lack of a comprehensive approach, whilst educators were asking for it. As a result, a set of nine blocks of career materials were either collected from existing resources or newly produced, and then made available online:

1. Materials to develop lessons, including exercises that can be downloaded and used in the classroom;
2. Ideas and formats for career events (in school and outside of school);
3. Updated information on professional profiles required in the labor market;
4. Tests about personality and professional attitude;
5. Methodologies on how to teach career education;
6. Other resources (anything that does not fit in other categories);
7. Laws and national regulations with regards to career development;
8. Ideas for field trips and creative workshops;
9. Formats of cooperation with employers (i.e. testimonials).

The content is regularly updated and expanded thanks to contributions from all over the country.

A national online event was organized towards the end of last year to present the tool to teachers from all over Latvia. Since then, the tool has also been presented in a few Career Weeks and, as the development Agency is a member of the National Association of Teachers, the tool was presented to the Association as well. In 2020 (starting from November 2nd) the online resource was used by 570 unique users. They checked 845 different subpages and spent on average of 3 minutes and 50 seconds on the platform. In 2021 (until April 20th) the online resource was used by 1249 unique users. They checked 1828 different subpages and spent on average of 4 minutes and 10 seconds on the platform. Therefore, there is clear indication that the online tool is increasingly used by the target audience.

As a result of the overall strategy, several other career development related activities have been launched in Valmiera, and more are planned to happen. First, and probably most importantly, a career counselling service for children was started. In order to ensure full and systematic career guidance for everyone, it is important to implement career development support activities that follow a specific plan and which generally cover all career development support elements - career information, career education and career counselling. A third edition of the Summer Employment Programme (in the form of employers' bootcamp), will be organized this summer over three events of a week each. Total attendance over the three years will be 500 children (age from 13 to 18)

Seminars and events for building capacity in teachers are being organized as well, providing a good opportunity for them to understand future professions, or how to run surveys in schools, or how to provide counselling to young people. Videos on career opportunities will be produced and marketed in schools and through social media.

Thanks to UIA funding, a Summer camp on STEM was designed and will see a third edition this summer. This activity will be covered in more depth in the next Zoom-in for the project, which will be focused on the NextGen's EdTech Factory project stream.

Lastly, it is important to mention that a Digital Career Portfolio is being developed thanks to UIA funding and will be launched online in September this year. Designed according to some best in class similar systems operating in Germany, Finland and Denmark, it will be a resource available nationally with the aim to track children's' development, needs and aspirations throughout their education career. More importantly, it will serve as the information feeder of the career counseling services being deployed. Children in Latvia already have a digital class tool (for school journals / diaries, etc.) and the career portfolio will be integrated as an additional feature in the existing digital class tool. It will be tested in Valmiera first, and then launched nationally. This activity will be covered in one of the next articles about the project.

[1]<https://www.gatsby.org.uk/education/focus-areas/good-career-guidance>

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