

D2.03: Research Findings

Executive Summary

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Digital Latin Quarter for building key competences of youth at risk

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Introduction

This document presents the Executive Summary that was prepared within the framework of the Digital Latin Quarter (DLQ) project, and presents an overview of the project as well as the main findings of the individual research reports completed by each respective consortium partner. The English version of the Executive Summary was prepared by CARDET and proofed by Meath Partnership, and was then sent out to the remaining implementing partners for translation. CARDET translated the Executive Summary into Greek, KBW to German and IC into Lithuanian. The English version of the Executive Summary and the relevant translations follow below.

Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of the individual research reports completed within the framework of the Digital Latin Quarter (DLQ) project. The research for each individual report was conducted by each respective consortium partner: Meath Community Rural and Social Development Partnership Limited (MCRSDP-Meath Partnership) focused its research on the Irish county of Meath, the Centre for the Advancement of Research and Development in Educational Technology (CARDET) conducted country-wide research in Cyprus, Kolping-Bildungswerk Württemberg e.V. (KBW) focused its research on the German Federal State of Baden-Württemberg, IDEJU Centras (IC) conducted country-wide research in Lithuania, Timesnap Productions Limited (Timesnap) based its research on the Irish counties of Louth and Meath, and Innoventum Oy (Innov) conducted country-wide research in Finland.

The DLQ project focuses on the needs and expectations of two main target groups. One group consists of youth leaders, professionals, and in general people who are involved in second-chance education (youth workers), and the second comprises individuals who have withdrawn early from the formal education system or who are at risk of withdrawing from formal education. The project aims to design and implement an accredited media production training programme for youth leaders and second-chance education workers, in order to support their use of new digital media platforms as learning tools in this model of training. Moreover, through this project, an all-inclusive suite of media-based, traditional, and embedded-learning key competence development resources for youth-at-risk will be designed, developed, and delivered. Finally, this project aims to provide a series of virtual collaborative environments linking youth workers and youth-at-risk from four European Union (EU) member states.

The main aim of this research report is to present the findings based on data collected by the different partners. The collated data are in keeping with the main thematic areas of the DLQ project, and the research specifically focused on the following themes:

- second-chance education;
- training courseware for professionals in the area of media production;
- online open-source training resources for media production skills;
- embedded learning key competence resources;
- personal and professional support for youth-at-risk and youth workers;
- online collaborative environments;
- web TV streaming.

The data that have been used in this report include reports, document reviews, national statistics, regional statistics, as well as interviews with stakeholders involved in second-chance education and embedded learning.

For example, according to the research conducted by Meath Partnership, following the inception of the DLQ project, an audit of youth services and training methodologies employed in County Meath and in Ireland was undertaken in order to validate what the localised priorities of DLQ needed to be, and also to investigate best practice examples currently being used by youth services. Following consultation with stakeholders, facilitated in the second phase of the research report as part of the project dissemination workshops, many gaps were identified and solutions were sought, which could improve the facilities for youth-at-risk and early school leavers in Meath.

The innovation behind the DLQ project was embraced by youth professionals and young people alike; however, due to deficiencies in resources for this sector in County Meath, it was stressed that additional supports would have to be as high a priority as the more prominent deliverables, such as the ACT curriculum and the Train-the Trainer courseware. Mentoring supports, career guidance, and flexibility of learning environments were highlighted as key areas, which would need attention in order to retain youth-at-risk and early school leavers who become involved in DLQ. Without these supports, the youth professionals expressed concern that the young people would not complete the programme and therefore would not develop the desired skills

and competences from the experience.

With this advice on board, investigation began into the programmes and initiatives already in operation with youth-at-risk and youth workers. In relation to the topics which were being audited as part of the research report, it was observed that there is very little in terms of the provision of targeted services in Meath. For example, while career guidance and train-the-trainer courseware are available in Meath, they are not targeted to vulnerable young people or the professionals who work with them in the county. Instead, these services are available for a much wider cohort of people that are generally employed in mainstream sectors or those who are currently seeking employment. Similarly, training opportunities on offer in the locality are focussed on traditional delivery and teaching methods. Typically, training is classroom-focused, and tends to be on topics, which to some would seem out-dated. While training opportunities are provided by the Irish National Training and Employment Authority (FÁS), County Meath Vocational Education Committee (VEC), and private companies, courses on offer still centre on the manufacturing and construction industries, which in recent years have seen the highest percentages of unemployment in County Meath. There are very few opportunities to acquire industry-level skills in digital media or Information Technology (IT), two of the largest growing sectors in Ireland at present, and two sectors that are set to continue to yield employment opportunities. Similarly, languages and the acquisition of language competencies have been identified as priority areas for job creation in Ireland in the future; yet, opportunities for language acquisition are not being offered in County Meath past level 3 on the European Qualifications Framework. For this reason, the language learning lab to be contained on the e-learning platform and the transnational nature and collaboration prospects for target groups involved in DLQ adds value to this project, as the potential to develop language competencies as well as industry-level digital skills will greatly enhance their future employment prospects.

Based on Meath Partnership's research, it has become apparent that while many of the structures for preventing and countering early school leaving exist in Meath at present, they are underdeveloped and insufficiently supported, and so youth services in Meath are constantly under strain. However, innovative and unique programmes have been piloted in other counties in Ireland, which employ methods of embedded-learning, combining learning and targeted career guidance to further enhance the provision of youth services in their area. One of the main ideas apparent in the research report related to County Meath is that the guiding principles and practices of these youth service innovations can be integrated into the planning and development of youth-centred strategies for DLQ.

With respect to Cyprus, the main findings of the research report completed by CARDET indicated that second-chance education opportunities prove to be successful and have exhibited improvement over the past few years; however, they still face many challenges and would greatly benefit from a curriculum and programme structure reform in order to be able to maintain their relevance to ongoing developments in the Cypriot society; but also in order to address the needs of the individuals enrolled in second-chance education. In addition, in Cyprus, second-chance education is an area that is currently under further development, especially due to European initiatives that are being implemented.

There are of course various challenges and gaps in service provision that need to be addressed in order for these services to better meet the needs of the target audience. In addition, areas such as courseware for media production, career and guidance supports for youth-at-risk and youth workers, and online collaborative environments within the context of second-chance education could benefit from restructuring so as to increase their usability and effectiveness. The same applies to resources related to embedded learning. Even though this learning approach is implemented as part of the education system in Cyprus and much progress has been made for its successful operation, there are still systemic challenges that need to be overcome. However, as it was indicated by the research, there is great interest from youth workers and youth-at-risk alike, in overcoming challenges and investing in alternative methods of learning; meaning that there is high potential for the DLQ project to make a positive impact in the country.

The report compiled by KBW presented the findings of their research conducted in relation to the Federal State of Baden-Württemberg. The analysis of the data collected revealed that there are numerous second-chance education opportunities and measures for youth-at-risk in Germany, particularly in the Federal State of Baden-Württemberg. In general, they prove to be successful and provide various possibilities. Nevertheless, it is also important to mention that the research revealed that there are many challenges such as accessibility of services to young people who are not registered in the Employment Agencies; motivational issues of young people; integration of young migrants, and increasing mental health issues.

Furthermore, the research revealed that even though unemployment and school-leaving rates are low in comparison to other German regions, it is important to focus on those groups that are marginalised, since the gap between well-educated and disadvantaged youth is high in the Federal State of Baden-Württemberg. Additionally, a special focus should be placed on migrants in the region, due to integration issues and

language barriers they face. Therefore, there is high potential for the DLQ project in the Federal State of Baden-Württemberg as it promotes creativity and alternative learning environments, where traditional learning and teaching methods have failed. Therefore, courseware for media production, career guidance supports for youth-at-risk and youth workers, and online collaborative environments within the context of second-chance education are essential for adapting to ongoing developments in society.

The research conducted in Lithuania by IC was based on content analysis of various laws, national strategies, and other relevant documents concerning second-chance education, as well as a couple of interviews with education professional, youth counsellors, and IT specialists. The findings of the research exhibited that the situation in Lithuania concerning second-chance education opportunities and non-traditional education for youth-at-risk, as well as media production training for youth workers and the existence of online environments for educational services, are of limited availability in the country. The research also demonstrated that the field of media production is unexploited in the education field and is considered a very novel tool through which to develop competencies of young people.

Timesnap's research regarding online collaborative environments and Web TV streaming for the counties of Louth and Meath in Ireland indicated that the counties are served by a number of local collaborative online learning resources, which are in an early stage of development, but are proving to be a very promising medium of delivering second-chance education opportunities, particularly to those with a non-traditional education background. In comparison to Louth and many other counties, Meath seems to be advanced in developing these resources, with County Meath VEC at the forefront of these activities. It should prove useful to at least consider the manner in which these collaborative online learning environments are designed and delivered prior to finalising the development of such resources for the DLQ project.

With respect to Web TV streaming, the counties of Louth and Meath are not served by many learning resources of this kind. The research conducted by Timesnap concluded that the development of this area is still at an infant state in the two counties even though County Meath is in a more advanced stage in terms of web TV streaming than County Louth. One example was found in Meath VEC, which was included along with three other national services that should prove useful from the point of view of the research.

In Finland, the main findings of the research conducted by Innoventum Oy focused on the areas of online collaborative environments and Web TV streaming. They revealed that there are quite a few e-learning examples that are in use in the

country and it could be argued that it is a rather developed area, since there are some Universities of Applied Sciences at which only online studies are offered. Furthermore, the utilisation of virtual learning environments such as Moodle, Optima, and Blackboard Learn in different schools in which e-learning is taking place, is very common. Some schools also use virtual conferencing software to deliver online lectures, such as Adobe Connect Pro and Skype, which can be used for this purpose.

Web TV streaming in Finland is an area that is not as widespread as the area of online collaborative environments. There are only two websites dedicated to streaming and creating educational material. The first one is dedicated mostly to creating content for upper secondary school students, and the other has materials and videos addressed to students from elementary school to adult education.

The research findings formulated by the research conducted by all the partners involved in the DLQ project revealed that many initiatives exist in all regions and countries under investigation. Furthermore, the research has underlined some examples of best practices provided by each partner, which can be used in the subsequent development and delivery of the DLQ project and contribute to the future development of particular resources that will be produced within the framework of this project. Even though the challenges and gaps which exist in the thematic areas that this research has examined have also been highlighted, this is an important factor to be considered when developing the curriculum and relevant material for the DLQ project as these gaps are also representative of the reality with respect to systemic operations in each partner country.