

# VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE IN THE SYSTEM OF LITHUANIAN EDUCATION: THE ANALYSIS AND PROBLEMS RELATED TO THE INFORMATION CONVEYED BY VOCATIONAL INFORMATION CENTRES OF UPPER-SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN VIRTUAL SPACE

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## Abstract

*The efficient provision of vocational guidance and counselling services appear as the key element of training and employment at local, regional and national levels and act as a component of an active labour market policy. The Government of the Republic of Lithuania have approved a number of strategic documents focusing on the development of an integral coherent system of vocational guidance. The aim of a vocational information centre (VIC) is to convey quality information about the world of occupations, promote self-knowledge of choosing the right profession while designing a personal career as well as provide the parents and teachers with the required information. Upon the formation of new tendencies towards vocational information and counselling services, the modern day man finds the need to obtain virtual information a crucial issue. Therefore, the conducted research has analyzed the abundance of data presented by VIC websites and suggested a model for information that matches with the needs of consumers.*

*The findings have allowed identifying the kind of information about VIC activities contained on the websites of upper-secondary schools and showed the content and problems of making information available in virtual space.*

**Key words:** counselling, vocational guidance, vocational information centres (VIC), VIC activity at upper-secondary schools.

## Introduction

An increasing pace of variations in society changes the approach to vocational information and guidance – one must be provided with knowledge and a possibility of developing skills in career planning, i.e. to feel trained to accept and implement real solutions concerning a personal career, adapt to ongoing changes and be responsible for individual decision-making. A Memorandum on

Lifelong Learning (2000) and the European Employment Strategy (2011) emphasize that vocational information and guidance, in the context of the European Union, play a key role in promoting lifelong learning, labour force adaptation to regularly changing market conditions, entrepreneurship and equal opportunities. Career planning, as a lifelong process, becomes crucial due to the fact that changes in labour market needs develop more and more rapidly. People increasingly adjust the nature of activity, seek for survival and strive for remaining competitive and successful in the labour market.

Choosing a profession is one of the most important decisions ever made by a person in his/her life. A job means not only a financial source of income but also emotional satisfaction and creative expression and development of personality. A successful career provides a possibility of being acknowledged in society and achieving a certain social status. Thus, a rational and consistent choice corresponding to the acquired abilities and interests of the preferred profession implies the development of professional behaviour and a motivated approach to other aspects of personal life. Society also accepts one's career as a central issue, because an optimal distribution of its members in different fields of activity creates conditions for the rational use of human resources, which makes a direct impact on social progress. Research conducted by L. Jovaiša (1999; 2009), S. Kregždė (1988), D. Beresnevičienė (1990; 2003), K. Pukelis (2003), R. Laužackas (2005), V. Šernas (1998), V. Stanišauskienė (2004) and a number of other scientists from our country shows that Lithuania has built a solid theoretical and practical foundation for the further development of vocational information and counselling.

Lithuania, as a part of the European Union, finds the rational use of human resources crucial, as the economic success of the country largely depends on the number of graduates from the institutions of higher education and on the individual's ability to find a proper place in the labour market and to be involved in appropriate activities exactly corresponding to the needs and capabilities. Therefore, yet from 2003, *Strategies for Vocational Guidance* approved by the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania and the Minister of Social Security and Labour have been providing that effectively maintained services of vocational guidance play a fundamental role in the education system, labour market and the interaction between these two areas. These services in particular help with a better acquisition of human resources and create favourable conditions for coordinating the abilities and interests of people with the existing opportunities of education and employment. The provided services must serve as the key element of training and employment at local, regional and national levels as well as remain an integral part of the active labour market policy.

Recently, vocational guidance in Lithuania has become a crucial factor qualitatively changing the interactions between all levels of education - general, vocational and higher. The importance of vocational guidance (career education, vocational (career) information, vocational (career) counselling) is emphasized by all strategic education documents. For the period 2005 – 2008, at the national level, the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania and its partners, along with the implementation of the goals of *Strategies for Vocational Guidance*, have fulfilled two projects of national importance *The Development and Implementation of Career Guidance System* and *The Development and Elaboration of Open Information, Counselling and Guidance System* (AIKOS) funded by the EU structural funds. The process involved the projects on normative documents dealing with vocational guidance, teaching programmes and methodologies for the staff working in this particular area as well as included trainings for the experts in the field. The strategic documents approved by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania as well as implemented national and institutional projects make a core of the created vocational guidance system in Lithuania, because the achieved results and the continuity of activities form preconditions for generating a coherent system for vocational guidance.

A crucial point is that the learners, upon completion of school, should deliberately select a further way of vocational activities and could best adapt their abilities, needs and interests. Lithuania has created legal normative assumptions about how to consistently develop services of vocational information and counselling. Also, a focus on the efficiency and availability of the services provided can be noticed. While improving and expanding the network of the infrastructure and experts in the field, including vocational advisers, at all levels, national normative documents validate an institution of a vocational adviser as a provider of vocational guidance services. The content of the

vocational adviser, in national context, is related to vocational information, vocational activity and job search services.

Carer planning begins yet at school when a young person decides on the preferred profession or a field of study. The very first more serious decision on a profession is usually made in class 10 along with working out an individual plan of learning and making a choice for course units. This is exactly the time when he or she must carefully choose among several options of pointing out the right way. Not all schoolchildren are capable of making a choice or decision, and therefore the career adviser able to offer helpful advice, to provide with relevant information or simply to encourage or motivate plays an important role. At this stage, all involved in the process of education, including the learners, their parents, teachers and class tutors, should be given advice.

The priority field of implementing the strategy for vocational guidance is infrastructure development aimed at assuring the availability of vocational guidance services and meeting the needs of customers. For this purpose, vocational information centres, as providers of such services, have been introduced. The process of choosing a profession appears as one of the most important and responsible undertakings sought by a young man. Therefore, without doubt, the majority of the VICs are established in comprehensive schools. The general regulations of vocational information centres (2008) specify that VIC activities mainly focus on the provision of quality vocational information services for the respondents accordingly to individual and societal needs making no exception to age, sex, nationality, place of residence or social status. Vocational guidance in the education system is aimed at giving assistance with a purposeful choice of appropriate educational and employment opportunities creating conditions for obtaining career skills and active involvement in building a personal career. Vocational guidance in the education system in Lithuania takes place providing the services of vocational information and counselling to those involved in career education. Apart from the above introduced main activity, the VICs collect data on occupations in Lithuania and requirements imposed on professions. The centres also accumulate information on qualifications obtained in vocational and higher schools (colleges and universities) in Lithuania and abroad, programmes of study and training, teaching and learning time, competitive admission and entrance requirements, enrolment conditions, statistical information about personal activity (record and process gathered data, contain records of visitors, develop action plans and reports), disseminate VIC services and collected methodical material, provide methodological support for the experts of educational establishments and teachers with regard to the issues of choosing a profession, organize business meetings, seminars, conferences and inform the public on the burning questions of youth career choices.

An appropriate organization of vocational information and counselling determines the successful implementation of the set goal. The formation of new tendencies for providing vocational information, counselling and guidance services indicates that presently, man experiences a rise in the relevance of the acquired virtual information. The conducted research displays how the content and goals of VIC activity as well as other information important to the customer are presented on the websites of upper-secondary schools.

**Object of research** – provision of the activity of vocational information points (VIP) on the websites of upper-secondary schools.

**Aim of research** – determining the type of public information about VIC activities on the websites of upper-secondary schools and defining the nature of disseminated information.

## Research Methodology

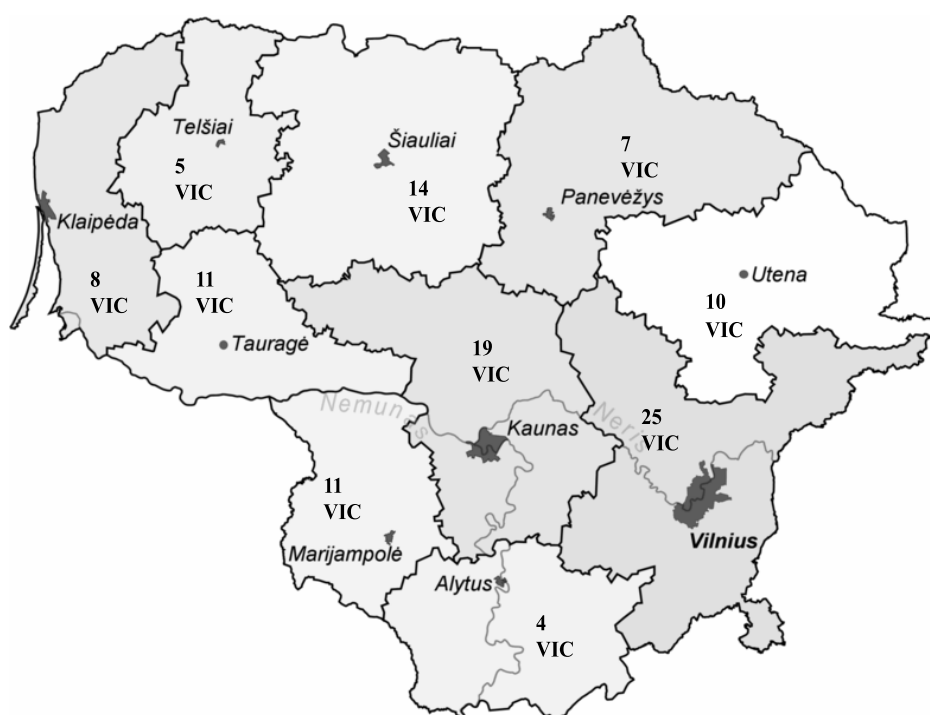
### *General Characteristics of Research*

The conducted research is based on objective principles that require social sciences and researchers to be neutral, indifferent and record facts leaving behind social and political assessment. Objectivism is the structure of consciousness that forms an opinion supported by objective regularities and commonly accepted concepts independent of an individual position. The authors believe that particularly this way of research accepts social information, including real phenomena or processes,

as the objective one. While analyzing information about VIC activity available on the web sites of upper-secondary schools, a qualitative approach, i.e. an interpretive paradigm that matches with a normative paradigm, is dominating. A part of the results of qualitative analysis has been already published (Augienė, Kriaučiūnaitė, 2012).

### *Sample and Process of Research*

Data for research was collected in September – December 2011. In total, 696 vocational information centres, according to the types of institutions, were revised on the websites. The examination of information provided by vocational information points of different establishments showed that the accredited VICs disclosed the largest amount of information. Thus, 307 workplaces approved by the VICs according to the types of institutions, were reconsidered. The highest number of the VICs were accepted in upper-secondary schools and made 114, which is the number that was chosen to carry out a survey considering the above presented situation. 114 websites of upper-secondary schools were looked over. The spatial selection of the accredited vocational information points of upper-secondary schools is displayed in Figure 1.



**Figure 1: Spatial selection of the accredited vocational information centres of upper-secondary schools.**

Information about the VICs on the websites of the Internet was collected following *Guidance on Providing Vocational Information and Counselling Services* (2005), *Strategies for Vocational Guidance* (2003) and *General Regulations on Vocational Information Centres* (2008) as the main criteria and indexes for showing if the VICs provide relevant information online. With reference to the introduced documents, the performed analysis included VIC activities, including goals, tasks, functions, etc. of the actions taken. The obtained information about approved VIC activity was represented on the websites of 76 upper-secondary schools.

### *Statistical Analysis*

To process research data, the measures of descriptive statistics (absolute and percentage frequencies) have been applied. The analysis of the obtained information included calculating the

frequencies of categories such as *the respondents involved in VIC activities, the objectives and tasks of VIC activities, VIC cooperation, guidance offered by the VICs, the structure of VIC activities for learners, the structure of VIC activities for parents, methodological support provided by the VICs for class tutors, methodological support provided by the VICs for the teachers of separate subjects and dissemination of information collected by the VICs.*

## Results of Research

To provide the customer with quality services of vocational information, a qualified team of experts is required. An important point was to find out the number of people involved in VIC activities undertaken by upper-secondary schools (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Information on the number of people involved in VIC activities (N/%).**

Number of people	N	%
1 person	12	15.8
Team work:	42	55.3
2 persons	11	14.5
3 persons	13	17.1
4 persons	5	6.6
5 persons	4	5.3
6 persons	4	5.3
7 persons	3	3.9
9 persons	1	1.3
11 persons	1	1.3
No information is provided	22	28.9

The above table displays that 15.8% of upper-secondary schools refer to a single person responsible for VIC activities, 55.3% of the schools give information that responsibility for these activities is shared by the teams making from 2 to 11 persons and 28,9% do not present any data on the employed. The team accountable for VIC activities most frequently involve vocational guidance counsellors, advisers on choosing a profession, psychologists, library and reading room staff, class tutors, subject teachers and vice-principals in charge of vocational guidance activities. For education purposes and successful careers of the students, enormous efforts are focused by the communities of upper-secondary schools.

The conducted research has established the goals and tasks the VICs declare on the websites of upper-secondary schools. The set goals and tasks also facilitated determining the directions of VIC activities (see Table 2).

**Table 2. Information on the goals and tasks of the VICs (N/%).**

Goals and tasks	N	%
Focus on vocational information and guidance offered to the student	52	68.4
Focus on assistance for the community of upper-secondary school (teachers, class tutors, administration, parents) helping the student with choosing a profession	30	39.5
Focus on the collection and dissemination of information	30	39.5
Focus on collaboration and search for social partners	26	34.2
Focus on improving the quality of vocational information and guidance	4	5.3
Not indicated	21	27.3

The major part of the VICs of upper-secondary schools (68.4%) emphasize the goals and tasks focusing on a learner so that to provide the student with relevant information and give advice on an individual teaching/learning plan thus adjusting it with the possibilities of the future studies and helping the learner with acquiring the abilities of planning a professional career. A large number of student-centred goals disclose that upper-secondary schools exercise their authority to appoint eligible activities and that vocational information appears as one of the priorities of VIC activity.

The following (68.4%) student-centred goals and tasks are predominating:

- to help the students with proper preparation for the approaching future career;
- to encourage the continuous pursuit of knowledge and plans for a vocational career;
- to educate a young person able to adapt in the information society, ready for lifelong learning and put down roots in the labour market and the world of vocational activities;
- to develop students' ability to coordinate individual needs for personal development with the requirements for the labour market; to promote social activity and responsibility for vocational activities to avoid unemployment;
- to plan and manage personal career development thus implementing the lifelong learning principle;
- to ensure the quality of provided services and accessibility to every student of comprehensive school;
- to generate student motivation to show interest in the professions needed for Lithuanian market;
- to teach self-analysis referring to counsellor's advice regarding the chosen profession and acquired knowledge so that to deepen knowledge and analyze personal likes, interests and skills;
- to develop student self-reliance and the ability to assess possibilities and to make an appropriate decision on the future career;
- to encourage students in an objective self-assessment of abilities, interests and possibilities; to offer students assistance in choosing and changing learning directions;
- to arrange meetings with the students of higher schools, representatives of vocational training centres and different professions; to organize outings, different events, group activities and workshops on career issues;
- to conduct research on the need for obtaining vocational information;
- to convey information on the possibilities of vocational careers, professions, the labour market and its forecasts;
- to inform the students about the opportunities to make a choice of and acquire different professions; to open up a possibility of using the Internet regarding the questions of vocational information;
- to improve the employability rates of young people, promote entrepreneurship and a continuous pursuit of knowledge, carry out testing thus helping them with realizing potentials for making the right decision on the chosen profession;
- to motivate students to a purposeful interest in selecting a profession;
- to notify and advise on working out an individual education plan and on the interaction between specialities, qualifications and professions;

39.5% of the VICs of upper-secondary schools indicate the goals and tasks focusing on the community of the school (teachers, class tutors, administration, parents). These are the established goals:

- to provide teachers, class tutors and parents with the latest information;
- to stimulate parents and teachers' social activity and develop responsibility for planning vocational careers of students;
- to assist the parents of socially vulnerable and unmotivated students in disclosing information about the present labour market and career opportunities.

The tasks set by the community of upper-secondary school and aimed at the development of vocational information and counselling activities are as follows:

- to inform the community about studying possibilities offered by the education system, admission requirements and qualifications obtained in vocational and higher schools;
- to provide class tutors and other teachers with the information about professions, labour market and its forecasts and opportunities of vocational careers;
- to guarantee the community of upper-secondary school accessibility to the available databases of vocational information and introduce the AIKOS system;
- to advise the parents on the issues related to choosing a profession, help with finding the required information about the desired occupation and assist in establishing the level of abilities with the help of testing.

39.5% of the VICs of upper-secondary schools focus on collecting and disseminating data on the system of national education, the variety of professions and requirements set to obtain it, training and employment opportunities and the situation in the labour market. Thus, the below introduced main tasks are predominating:

- to collate vocational information corresponding to the needs of the target groups and make it available thus creating conditions for taking rational decisions on choosing a profession, planning a personal career and adjusting individual needs to labour market requirements;
- to publish relevant information about the issues of vocational guidance in the display of the school and staffroom (on demand); to look after a vocational guidance point in the school library;
- to provide the school community with information about labour market needs and occupations in demand.

34.2% of the VICs of upper-secondary schools cope with the tasks concentrating on collaboration with and search for social partners. Most frequently the duties, including collaboration with internal, i.e. class tutors, subject teachers, etc. and external, i.e. other VICs of educational institutions, municipal education institutions, labour exchange, vocational and higher schools, etc. partners are indicated.

Only 5.3% of the VICs of upper-secondary schools point out quality improvement tasks that may involve training courses and seminars for the employees working in the field of vocational careers. The centres also refer to organizing the process of data storage regarding career preparation and peculiarities of different professions so that to provide customers with quality services of vocational information and guidance. The obtained information may be relevant to high school teachers willing to improve their knowledge in the fields of vocational information and guidance and eager to assist the students with making an appropriate decision on choosing the right career path. It can be assumed that the professional development of the teachers and other staff of upper-secondary schools in this particular field cannot be attributed to the priorities while being engaged in VIC activities.

Quite a few VICs emphasize the tasks aimed at collaboration with and search for social partners. Collaboration opens up a possibility of exchanging gained experience for the VICs, receiving relevant information, expanding activity and improving its quality. The internal and external partners involved in collaboration with the VICs were important figures of research (see Table 3).

**Table 3. Information on collaboration with the VICs (N/%).**

Collaboration with vocational information points (VIPs)	N	%
Internal collaboration with		
Social pedagogue of an upper-secondary school	31	40.8
Staff of the library, reading room of an upper-secondary school	26	34.2
Psychologist of an upper-secondary school	25	32.9
Administration of an upper-secondary school	25	32.9

Collaboration with vocational information points (VIPs)	N	%
Subject teachers	22	28.9
Class tutors	17	22.4
External collaboration with		
Universities	13	17.1
Colleges	11	14.5
Vocational schools	9	11.8
Institutions of vocational information and counselling	12	15.8
Labour exchange / youth employment centre of labour exchange	10	13.2
Other VIPs	9	11.8
Municipal education authorities (secondary and upper-secondary schools)	8	10.5
Labour market vocational training centre	3	3.9
Business and employment agencies	3	3.9
Other (students' business club of the international organization Hakes; KUT career centre; Vilnius craft centre)	3	3.9
Not indicated	17	22.4

The findings of the conducted research have disclosed that, in the majority of cases, the VICs of upper-secondary schools prefer internal collaboration. High-quality career education activities in upper-secondary school are stimulated involving class tutors, the teachers of different subjects, a social pedagogue, psychologist, the staff of the reading room, library, those having competencies in displaying vocational information and offering counselling for the purpose of to more effectively help the students with preparation for life and work as well as for choosing an appropriate field of study. An external collaboration between the VICs and universities, colleges and establishments of vocational education encourage joint projects and activities: visits to open day events and delivering lectures, organizing conferences as well as giving counselling to the students of upper-secondary schools. Collaboration with the institutions of vocational information, counselling and municipal education establishments (secondary and upper-secondary schools) promotes participation in different seminars and trainings at local, regional and national levels. The development of communications with business and employment agencies aids in making outings to various enterprises, institutions and organizations. Collaboration with labour exchange and the youth employment centre helps the students with a better acquisition of supply and demand in the labour market and assists in research on employment possibilities. Collaboration between the VICs of upper-secondary schools and vocational training centres also plays an important role, as these establishments make advise, carry out research and test the intellectual abilities and aptitudes of the students upon choosing a profession. Making and developing contacts with vocational information and counselling work groups of other VICs encourages exchanging information obtained during seminars, courses and other events.

Counselling and information given to the interested people is one of the central areas of VIC activity. The findings of research have disclosed that the VICs provide information and offer counselling services to different target groups (see Table 4).

**Table 4. Information on counselling services provided by the VICs (N/%).**

Counselling services	N	%
Individual counselling (target group is not indicated)	33	43.4
Student group counselling	66	86.8
Parent counselling	39	51.3
Counselling for class tutors	11	14.5
Teacher counselling	31	40.8



Counselling services	N	%
Counselling for other members of the community	12	15.8
Other (counselling for social pedagogues, psychologists)	1	1.3
Not indicated	6	7.9

The above table indicates that, in most of the cases, the VICs offer group counselling services (86.8%). 43.4% of the VICs of upper-secondary schools, on their websites, give individual counselling. Parent counselling has been mentioned by 51.3%, teacher counselling – by 40.8% and counselling for other members of the community – by 15.8% of the VICs, whereas counselling for class tutors makes only 14.5%. No information about counselling services has been provided by 7.9% of the VICs of upper-secondary schools.

Along the implementation of vocational information and counselling, individual advice for all involved groups are the most effective. The presented groups play a crucial role in helping a student with investigating different possibilities of a vocational career thus relating data on professions with personal interests, attitudes and possibilities and arriving at an appropriate decision. Group counselling is useful for getting acquainted with the main steps of career planning, studying the sources of vocational information (printed publications, websites) and receiving relevant information that should help with planning the upcoming future career. Counselling for parents, who are closest to and perfectly familiar with the child, is also of high priority, and therefore could be competent in giving advice regarding the issues of choosing a profession. Counselling for class tutors and teachers covers information on the questions addressed to obtaining various professions and specialities. Class tutors obtain knowledge of vocational information and can apply the acquired data during class meetings or arranging class events and trips. The teachers can integrate vocational information into the content of the taught subject.

The right choice of the forms of the actions taken plays a crucial role in providing information and counselling interested persons. The carried out research has disclosed the types of activities applied by the VICs in their work with the students (see Table 5), parents (Table 6), class tutors (Table 7) and teachers (Table 7).

**Table 5. Information on the forms of student-centred activity undertaken by the VICs (N/%).**

Forms of activity	N	%
Meetings	36	47.4
Testing/ research	33	43.4
Outings, excursions	31	40.8
Lectures/sessions	27	35.5
Events (celebrations etc.)	10	13.2
Seminars	6	7.9
Work with projects	6	7.9
Clubs	5	6.6
Optional school subject (including classes, practical training, seminars, etc.)	2	2.6
Visual demonstrations: films, TV shows, pictures, schemes, diagrams, photos, albums, etc.	3	3.9
Contests	1	1.3
Games	1	1.3
Exhibitions	1	1.3
Discussions	1	1.3
Not indicated	21	27.6

The above table displays that meetings appear as one of the most frequently organized forms of student activity undertaken by the VICs of upper-secondary schools, which makes 47.4%, as indicated on the websites. The arranged meetings involve former students and representatives of different professions from Lithuanian and foreign institutions of higher education, various organizations, vocational training centres, labour exchange, etc.

43.4% of the VICs of upper-secondary schools refer to testing or research activities. The learners perform tests and fill in the questionnaires that help with a more accurate assessment of aptitudes, abilities, personal qualities and suitability for one or another profession. These are the most commonly applied tests and questionnaires: improving self-knowledge, setting a type of personality, a test on vocational specialization *Temperament and Profession*, a questionnaire on vocational awareness for the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year students of upper-secondary school, H. Aizenk's test on investigating personal qualities, John L. Holland's test on vocational choices, a test based on research conducted by A. Golom tok *The Interests Map*, a differential - diagnostic questionnaire and the questionnaire on vocational awareness. The conducted research corresponded to the individual needs of a student, a group of learners or a class. The questionnaire *Learning to Make Choices for the Future* has been carried out.

As regards vocational information, 40.8% of the VICs of upper-secondary schools specify they arrange outings during the open days arranged by educational institutions, high school fairs, career days and exhibitions.

35.5% of the VICs of upper-secondary schools emphasize they are engaged in activities that introduce the major steps in career planning, explore vocational information sources (printed material, websites) and receive valuable information that assists in planning vocational careers for the future. The students most frequently examine the following topics: *Gradual Planning of the Future Career*, *Choosing the Right Path for Future Studies*, *Introducing Institutions of Vocational Education*, *Preparation for Studies*, *Limits to Personal Skills in Making Choices between Professions*, *Introducing Universities and Colleges*, *Job Search*, *Employment Opportunities and Employers' Requests*, *Preconditions for Successful Studies*, *Self-knowledge and Profession*, *Overcoming Fear of Examinations*, *Choosing the Right Profession*, *Introducing AIKOS Information System*, *Career Planning Steps*, *Studies Abroad*, *My style of Studying*.

The students of upper-secondary schools have been provided a possibility of attending the lectures and seminars such as *Self-Learning and Skills in Efficient Studying*, *Playing a Future Career*, *Was Robinson Crusoe A Business Man?*, *What Leads to Success in Business?*, *Shaping Personal Future*, *Career Leaders* as well as involved in the projects and programmes *Feel Pleasure in Making A Job*, *Feel Brave for the Future*, *Fair of Professions*, *Building Future Yourself*.

6.6% of the VICs of upper-secondary schools find non-formal education activities as one of the methods for presenting the students vocational information. The students themselves can choose between different options. The websites point out that some upper-secondary schools run such clubs as *Career Planning*, *Building a Personal Career* and *Developing Skills in Career Planning*. 2,6% of the schools offer an optional subject *Career Planning* for the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year students, whereas 3,9% of the VICs provide information that the employed visual aids may cover films, TV shows, pictures, schemes, diagrams, photos and albums of representatives of different professions.

Research findings have disclosed that almost a half (47.4%) of the surveyed VICs of upper-secondary schools make a possibility of meeting the people representing different professions as well as the teaching staff and students of Lithuanian and foreign institutions of higher education.

For coming to a decision on choosing the right profession, support received from and advice given by adults plays a crucial role. Thus, in this case, the level of assistance offered by the VICs for parents, class tutors and teachers is an important factor. For this purpose, the forms of activity stimulated by the VICs and focused on the parents (See Table 6), class tutors (Table 7) and teachers (Table 8) have been analyzed.

**Table 6. Information on the forms of parent-centred activity undertaken by the VICs (N/%).**

Forms of activity	N	%
<b>Lectures</b>		
Description of secondary education and possibilities of choosing an individual education plan	4	5.3
Possibilities of employment in Lithuania and foreign countries, labour market status, retraining opportunities	3	3.9
Teaching and studying system / studying institutions / enrolment conditions	2	2.6
Useful Internet sources and assistance in learning to apply them in practice	1	1.3
<b>Events</b>		
Parents Day / The Open Day in an upper-secondary school	2	2.6
Provided information		
Meetings with the parents	6	7.9
Guidance		
Together with children	4	5.3
Individual	39	51.3
Not indicated	31	40.8

The table shows that only 13.1% of the VICs of upper-secondary schools offer lectures to the parents. 5.3% of the VICs invite to the lectures on the description of secondary education and possibilities of choosing an individual education plan, 53.9% - on the possibilities of employment in Lithuania and foreign countries, labour market status and retraining opportunities, 2.6% - on the teaching and studying system, studying institutions and enrolment conditions and 1.3% - on useful Internet sources and assistance in learning to apply them in practice. The parents receive information during The Open Day in an upper-secondary school (2.6%) and meetings with the parents (7.9%). The parents are also provided with information on the options of choosing course subjects and units working out an individual education plan for the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year students of upper-secondary school and the qualities of vocational teaching programmes (at a later stage, entering colleges and universities) as well as with data on the options of future studies and the principles of calculating a competitive university's score. In most of the cases, the VICs give individual guidance for parents (51.3%). Even 40.8% of the VICs do not indicate any activity related to the parents. The research results have disclosed that the VICs do not organize a sufficient number of events and lectures to the parents.

**Table 7. Information on methodological support from the VICs for class tutors (N/%).**

Methodological support	N	%
Prepare materials and provide assistance in conducting class meetings	13	17.1
Supply with the latest information	7	9.2
Help with arranging meetings with the representatives of other educational establishments.	6	7.9
Assist in making outings for the purpose of obtaining vocational information	6	7.9
Aid in organizing different events	1	1.3
Design questionnaires and carry out self/assessments regarding student possibilities and outlooks	1	1.3
Methodological support	1	1.3
Systematically supply with the latest information through e-mails	1	1.3

Methodological support	N	%
Provide assistance with integrating knowledge of vocational orientation into classroom activities	1	1.3
Provides links to data sources	1	1.3
Guidance	11	14.5
Not indicated	31	40.8

The table presents that 17.1% of the VICs of upper-secondary schools prepare material and provide assistance for class tutors with arranging class meetings. The VICs also supply the tutors with a list of suggested classes and frequently make notes on imparting the latest information and arranging meetings with the representatives of other educational establishments as well as assist in generating discussions with the people of various professions, labour exchange experts, specialists of higher and vocational schools, famous people and former schoolchildren and help in going on outings for the purpose of obtaining vocational information in study fairs, university career centres, vocational centres and schools, labour exchange, etc. Only a minor part of the VICs agree they contribute to organizing different events (1.3%), including the week of vocational information (1.3%), offer methodological support for class tutors (1.3%), submit slides that can be used by the tutors for the purpose of vocational information and guidance (1.3%) and provide assistance with integrating knowledge of vocational orientation into classroom activities (1.3%). A single VIC provides the tutors with links to data sources such as post-secondary education, peculiarities of career decision making, work in modern society, the storytelling approach and opportunity acknowledgement. The research results have disclosed that class tutors receive insufficient support from the VICs for training the learners for future careers.

The VICs express varying methodological support for the teachers of separate subjects (see Table 8).

**Table 8. Information on methodological support expressed by the VICs for the teachers of separate subjects (N/%).**

Methodological support	N	%
Seminars	1	1.3
Subject-related assistance with integrating knowledge of vocational information into the content of the subject taught	4	5.3
Supply with the latest information	15	19.7
Guidance	31	40.8
No information on providing methodological support is indicated	30	39.5

The teachers most frequently are offered the seminars on the topics such as a national vocational guidance system, the content and structure of vocational information and guidance, the possibilities of career education in comprehensive school. Only 5,3% of the VICs of upper-secondary schools assist with integrating knowledge of vocational information into the content of the subject taught (for instance, the integration of vocational information into the subjects of ethics and economics is indicated). 19,7% of the VICs find the latest information on the issues of choosing a profession or speciality as one of activity forms and 40.8% - offer guidance on relevant vocational information and counselling questions. 39.5% of the VICs of upper-secondary schools do not indicate they provide the teachers with methodological support in discussing the problems of career education. The results of the conducted research suggest that the teachers feel a lack of support from the VICs as regards knowledge of having debates with the students about the selection of the future career.

One of the tasks performed by the VICs is to collect and manage vocational information that meets the needs of target groups. Table 9 shows the dissemination of data acquired by the VICs of upper-secondary schools.

**Table 9. Dissemination of VIC managed information to different target groups (N/%).**

Information	N	%
Links to the Internet databases	52	68.4
Virtual measures for vocational information, publications, articles, tests	30	39.5
Displayed material / announcements by the VICs	14	18.4
Methodical and specific literature	8	10.5
Information booklet /flyer	5	6.6
Binders / folders	5	6.6
CD, DVD about professions	3	3.9
Not indicated	10	13.2

The above table displays that 68.4% of the VICs of upper-secondary schools, in their websites, give links to the Internet databases that help with making rational decisions on choosing a profession and career planning. Most frequently the links refer to the open system of information, counselling and guidance, the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania, science and studies in Lithuania, National Examination Centre, everything about studies in Lithuania, Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education, a project under the supervision of Education Exchanges Support Foundation (vocational guidance and counselling), Lithuanian High School Association for adopting enrolment procedures, education portal, Lithuanian Labour Exchange and CV database. Also, the following international links to the Internet databases focused on search for study and work abroad are usually proposed: International Education and Career Advising Centre, possibilities of studying abroad, Portal on Learning Opportunities throughout the European Space, European Youth Portal, Europass and recruitment and selection services in Europe. Also, the Internet addresses of the websites of Lithuanian colleges and universities are displayed, which opens up the opportunity for the students and their parents and teachers to find information about self-evaluation as well as on choosing, purchasing, exchanging or further developing a career.

39.5% of the VICs of upper-secondary schools provide links to the virtual media of vocational orientation, publications, articles, tests, etc. The links cover electronic media, publications and articles such as *Places to Study*, *Career Planning Steps*, *School of Your Career*, *Useful Knowledge*. This is the place a consumer may find instructions and advice on how to write a curriculum vitae (CV) and cover letter. Besides, tests on vocational purposefulness, including a test on assessing individual's single-mindedness, a test on evaluating communication - organizational inclinations, a test on choosing a profession, a differential - diagnostic questionnaire by E. Klimov, a questionnaire on defining interests and skills, a test on applying for a suitable job and Jung Typology Test (setting a possible profession) are given.

18.4% of the VICs of upper-secondary schools point out that the most relevant latest information about the issues of career planning is available as displayed material and can be checked on the Internet referring to the link 'commercials' that presents data on the planned meetings and other arrangements, including outings to the open days taking place in colleges and universities.

10.5% of the VICs of upper-secondary schools introduce methodological and specific material that can be a helpful tool for planning a career for the future. The topics include *Lithuanian Classification of Occupations* and *Methodological Material for Teaching Followed by Vocational Advisers* as well as publications *Education and Vocational Guidance in Lithuania*, *Vocational Counselling and Information*, *Refresher Program and Methodological Recommendations*, *Best Practices of VICs*, *Methodological Material for the Expert in the Field of Vocational Information*, *Guide to Vocational Information and Counselling (Volumes I – III)*, *Methods and Techniques for Vocational Counselling*, a book *Looking to the Future* by N. Perry and Z. Van Zandt, a journal *Enrolment Possibilities* and other publications issued by separate establishments of higher education.

6.6% of the VICs of upper-secondary schools mention they collect folders that assist with obtaining relevant information on choosing a profession. The material held in the folders covers the

following topics: description of occupations, qualification requirements for selecting the preferred profession, advice on opting for a future career, studying overseas, the addresses of educational institutions, etc. The collected folders bring the titles such as *The Attributes of a Successful Career (curriculum vitae, cover letter, recommendation, interview, etc.)*, *Information Provided by Lithuanian Labour Exchange*, *Expert Advice on Looking for a Job*, *Learning Possibilities for the Students with Special Needs*, *Opportunities and Conditions for Studying Overseas*, *Relevant Information*, *Description of Open Door Days*, *Tests and Questionnaires*, *Support for the Class Tutor*, *Making the Right Choice on a Career*, *Information for the Graduate (Parts 1, 2 & 3)*, *Secondary Education and Your Opportunities*, *Basic Education and Your Opportunities*.

The findings of the survey reveal that 68.4% of the VICs of upper-secondary schools provide links to the online databases. A possibility of referring to the latest information facilitates the process of planning a vocational career. It can be accepted that the VICs accumulate data on the professions available in Lithuania and on the imposed requirements for pursuing a career. Also, the VICs gather facts and figures about acquired qualifications, training and study programmes, the span of studying, enrolment procedures, admission requirements, etc. Thus, a conclusion that the VICs provide enough virtual information on professions and labour market can be made.

## Discussion

Human resources are supposed to be the greatest wealth of the European Union which therefore ensures competitiveness, economic growth and social well-being (OECD, 2004a, 2004b). The rational and appropriate use of the resources is the key goal of the policy focusing on education and labour market. Thus, in the context of the European Union, vocational guidance and counselling can be accepted as one of the major factors encouraging employment, labour force adjustment to market conditions, social integration, entrepreneurship and equal opportunities. Recently, vocational guidance and counselling have been increasingly linked to economic and social policy and strategic directions of lifelong learning. In this case, new trends towards improving the effectiveness of vocational guidance services have been suggested. Vocational guidance and assistance in planning a future career have become a continuous multi-faceted process that lasts throughout an individual's life. The field of vocational guidance and counselling has been investigated by D. Beresnevičienė (2003), K. Pukelis (2003), R. Laužackas (2005), V. Šernas (1998), Indrašienė, V. Rimkevičienė, M. Gaigalienė et al. (2006), A. Railienė (2011), T. Lileikienė (2009), D. Augienė (2009) and a number of other scientists who realize in action the necessity of guidance and counselling services for the students and other consumers.

An approach to a career design as a permanent lifelong process, promotes searching for the new opportunities in the whole current system of vocational guidance. After joining the European Union, Lithuania has adopted adequate legislation regulating the fields related to such guidance and has set a proper legislative framework enabling the provision of vocational guidance and counselling services run by vocational information points for almost a decade, which helps a person with making information-based rational decisions on choosing a profession.

Vocational guidance is focused on help for those deliberately choosing appropriate educational and employment opportunities and assists with creating conditions for acquiring occupational competencies and creating a future career. Vocational guidance is conducted with reference to the principles of accessibility, equity, freedom of choice and personal responsibility for career decisions, individualization and quality services. The school must ensure that every learner of the institution should be informed about where, when and how make use of services on career education, guidance and counselling (Description of the Procedures for Vocational Guidance, 2012).

Vocational guidance and counselling take place providing services to career education. On these grounds, the school must accept the peculiarities of developmental stages of the learner and create conditions for all students to obtain career competencies, including knowledge, personal skills and attitudes, learning, self-expression and job opportunities, career decision making, career planning, implementation and adjustment to other important areas of life. The school, along with providing the students with vocational information, must act under circumstances that allow receiving and discussing data on the possibilities of studying and employment. For this purpose, different

measures and tools such as outings, events, excursions and meetings with the representatives of education institutions, employers and other important people must be employed. The school, also, apart from vocational counselling, must offer students the possibilities of acknowledging, assessing and discussing their personal qualities that may have an impact on the future career, must assist in dealing with the questions related to career planning and studies as well as with the issues looking at the problems of the future career and addressed to social, psychological and health factors. The school should take responsibility over the questions of job search.

Recently, the new tendencies towards services focused on vocational information, counselling and guidance have demonstrated the increasing need for obtaining virtual information. In this particular case, specific websites appear as a highly effective form of data dissemination.

Vocational information and counselling play a crucial role at school, as the students must choose between the subjects and courses of an individual plan of education thus relating their decision to the future career. Considering the necessity of vocational information and counselling at school, the conducted research helped with assessing the extent and type of information provided by the VICs on the websites of upper-secondary schools. The data included the questions of making a choice on the future career.

The summarized findings of empirical research on the information imparted by the VICs and displayed on the websites of upper-secondary schools show that the aim to supply customers with online information about the VICs has been sufficiently developed which therefore should be important to those planning their future careers. However, up to now, the above introduced process cannot be treated as success. The results of the carried out research also indicate that online displayed data are not sufficiently detailed. The arrangement of activities done by the VICs is rather sketchy: the websites rarely present action plans or programmes, and the teachers and parents feel a severe lack of the introduced information. The VICs provide little data on external collaboration, because the majority of the VICs of upper-secondary schools develop the internal one.

## Conclusions

The analysis of downloaded information about VIC activities has revealed that the teams made of 2 to 11 people are frequently responsible for career education of the students. The obtained data have been displayed on the websites of upper-secondary schools. The team involves people occupying different positions in upper-secondary schools. Therefore, obviously, such activity includes a large group of school teachers. Hence, school communities put a great deal of effort into students' education careers.

The established goals and approached tasks point out trends towards VIC activities. The pursued goals are more focused on student's vocational guidance thus providing a learner with assistance in choosing a profession, collecting and disseminating information, collaboration and search for social partners. However, the goals, tasks and functions of VIC activities very often are presented in a dry laconic manner. The websites of the VICs experience shortage of data on the organized specific activity of vocational information and guidance. Thus, it can be maintained that the suggested data only partially meet the needs of the interested parties.

As for career education, the VICs of upper-secondary schools emphasize external and internal collaboration. To achieve the set goals, the majority of the VICs develop internal collaboration with the teachers of a particular subject, a psychologist, social pedagogue and administration. The external collaboration of the VICs of upper-secondary schools takes place with universities, colleges, vocational schools and labour exchange. Collaboration with other VICs, the educational establishments of the Municipality (secondary and upper-secondary schools) and the career centres of universities is rarely mentioned.

The content of the given information about the forms of VIC activity is sufficiently detailed. The websites of the VICs regularly introduce student meetings with the representatives of different professions and higher schools as well as offer individual and group counselling. A smaller number of the VICs of upper-secondary schools suggest testing the students and organize outings, excursions and lectures on the issues of career planning. Other forms of action concentrating on vocational information such as different events, shows, seminars, projects, informal activity, etc.



are rarely employed by the VICs. Moreover, the number of performances and lectures delivered to the parents by the VICs is insufficient. Only a few schools make such arrangements through the open door days, supply them with information in parent meetings and give advice for the parents and their children together.

The VICs give class tutors very limited assistance in preparing for the actions taking place in the classroom, planning outings and meetings that involve the representatives of other educational institutions and organizing other events. The teachers of separate subjects feel a lack of information on providing the students with the required data on the issues of choosing a career and integrating vocational guidance into the content of the subject taught. The VICs, on their websites, supply the teachers of upper-secondary schools with the latest information about career education.

The analysis of upper-secondary schools has disclosed that the VICs abundantly provide links to online databases. Data on the qualifications obtained in higher and vocational schools, training and education programmes as well as admission requirements facilitate planning a vocational career. Hence, the final conclusion that the VICs impart enough virtual information about the occupations and labour market can be made.

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