



GOOD PRACTICES IN STUDENT ENGAGEMENT WITH SOCIETY

SSE FUTURE LEADERS ACADEMY

Fostering Student Engagement through AI-driven Qualitative Quality Assurance Practices
A Project Developed by:



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MCAST



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Project: Fostering Student Engagement through AI-driven Qualitative Quality Assurance Practices

Consortium Partners

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General Information

Title: *SSE Future Leaders Academy*

Organization: *Stockholm School of Economics in Riga*

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Country: *Latvia*

One liner: The FLA program is designed for young people who link their future with the development of Latvia and the world, want to meet like-minded young people, Latvian political and community leaders, industry experts, and wish to develop their leadership and communication skills. The program educates, inspires, and develops the leadership potential of future Latvian political and community leaders

Short Summary:

The Future Leaders Academy (FLA) is a programme at the Stockholm School of Economics in Riga (SSE Riga) that aims at educating, inspiring and developing the leadership potential of future Latvian community leaders.

To do so, FLA works with an effective network of partnerships: Alumni provide networking opportunities and role models, local NGOs train students on critical thinking, media representatives provide workshops on media literacy, the Chancellery and various ministries of Latvia are invited as speakers, The Embassy of Sweden trains in diplomacy, and higher education institutions of the country promote the programme.

The FLA model is highly transferable and has the potential for promoting cooperation between diverse sectors to boost the potential of young leaders.

1. Introduction and Overview

Short description

The Stockholm School of Economics in Riga (SSE Riga) is a business school in Riga, Latvia, founded in 1994 and over the years has acquired a reputation as the leading business school in the region.

Founded by the Stockholm School of Economics and the Latvian Government, SSE Riga has grown today into an internationally recognised business school with more than 2,500 alumni worldwide.

SSE Riga is a comparatively small school with a dynamic international learning environment where the majority of the courses are based on the case study method. Tuition is charged, and instruction is in English. In addition to student loans guaranteed by the government and SSE Riga, students have access to other types of financial support, such as SSE Riga Alumni Association Scholarships.

SSE Riga offers two accredited study programmes: a three-year Bachelor's programme in Economics and Business, and an Executive MBA – a two-year professional Master's programme.

According to the charter of the Alumni Association of the Stockholm School of Economics in Riga, every person that has received a degree from SSE Riga is eligible to become a member of the Alumni Association. All members are split into groups by graduation year.

Over the last few years, the Alumni Association has demonstrated its support for the SSE Riga by raising funds for first-year student scholarships. The long-term goal is to reach and maintain 50% of alumni as active donators, marking SSE Riga alumni as the most active donators amongst business schools worldwide.

Furthermore, the high level of alumni participation also demonstrates that education from SSE Riga is highly valued and worth supporting.

- 130 students every year are admitted to the Bachelor's programme
- 20-30 students every year enrol in the Master's programme

- Student community includes students from 10 countries and international exchange students from more than 15 countries
- BSc Economics and Business; Executive MBA; Master's programme in Service Design Strategies and Innovation (SDSI); Since 1994 SSE Riga Executive Education offers open and custom-designed executive education programmes and courses for both large and small/medium-sized companies
- Private financing

The SSE Riga mission is to contribute to the competitiveness of the Baltic countries through education and research.

The mission rests on five pillars the BSc programme, the Executive MBA programme, Executive Education, research, and the Centre for Media Studies. All of them contribute to the fulfilment of the mission and the BSc programme mainly has an impact in the long term, whereas the other four activities or pillars have an impact in the short to medium term.

Background Information

The “Future Leaders Academy” (FLA) is a program held at the Stockholm School of Economics in Riga, organized in cooperation with the Embassy of Sweden in Latvia, and with support from the Swedish Institute since 2017. During the last five years, the SSE Riga has hosted five leadership academies, and now over 100 young leaders have completed the training program. The program has also become highly regarded by the Latvian leaders, and last year during the academy the current and former President of Latvia spoke, as did the Minister of Science and Education and the Minister of Health, in addition to the Former Commissioner of Human Rights of the Council of Europe, among others. The Latvian leaders are now eager to participate as speakers in the program in order to engage with young leaders and to hear their opinions about future development trajectories. During the Swedish Crown Princess's visit to Latvia in 2018, some of the participants had the chance to meet with her Royal Highness and discuss their issues of concern that impact the Baltic Sea region.

The idea for the program was born out of recognizing that Sweden, and other Scandinavian countries, have similar programs to encourage young people to learn about politics, become engaged in political issues, and consider a career in politics.

Political involvement in Latvia, especially among the youth, is very low. Voter turnout in elections and party membership is very low, membership in non-governmental organizations and interest groups is low, and trust in political institutions and national government is well below the EU average. In order to facilitate sustainable development and bring about the necessary changes to the system, Latvia has a distinct need for new politicians and community leaders willing to engage with society. This program tries to remedy these issues by working with politically motivated youths who have the potential to go on to be Changemakers in Latvia.

In addition, the gender equality of women in politics has been decreasing and Russian language speakers are traditionally identified with the opposition party in Parliament. In the current Saeima there are only 27 women out of 100 elected deputies, and that number is down from the 2018 election when 31 out of 100 deputies were women. One of the aims of the program is to encourage women to enter politics and to be assertive about their ideas and their vision for Latvia. Thus, an equal number of women and men, striving for gender balance, are accepted into the program. The same applies to Russian language-speaking minorities. The program includes a proportional number of native Russian speakers in the youth leaders' group, in order to both develop their future potential and understanding of the political climate in Latvia and also to stimulate integration among the young leaders themselves facilitating friendships and cooperation.

The model of "Future Leaders Academy" can be found in several countries across the world. Programs differ by the target group, objectives, agenda, and motivation, but the core concept stays the same – enhance the leadership development of youth. In 2017, the first year of the program, the SSE Riga issued an open call to motivate young people aged 18 to 27, interested in politics, social life, entrepreneurship, or other specific area. Since then, each year the program brings together a group of like-minded young people, mostly students from different areas. Participants attend sessions on weekends for 5 weeks and meet with industry leaders, public servants,

political and community leaders, media representatives, and entrepreneurs. The speakers share their professional experiences and discuss up-to-date topics, which interest the participants. In addition, targeted workshops to develop relevant skills are held, such as public speaking, argumentation, media relations, and presentation.

Aims and Motivations

The aim of the FLA is to educate, inspire and develop the leadership potential of future Latvian political and community leaders and to provide them with an opportunity to meet like-minded peers to develop their contact network. The programme aims to stimulate leadership and critical thinking skills in the participants.

Specific objectives of the programme are:

- Enhance the inclusion of vulnerable groups, minorities, and Russian-speaking target groups in the region.
- Promote the exchange and cooperation between agents for change and opinion leaders from various sectors advocating sustainable development, democracy and gender equality, and decision-makers in the political and business arenas.
- Promote the opportunity for entrepreneurship and innovation with the emphasis both on women's enterprise and on the responsible and sustainable enterprise.
- Create diversity in the media sector and enhanced freedom of expression, focusing on the development of free and independent media, in particular Russian-language media, information and media awareness among selected target groups, and public access to objective and independent information.

By bringing together talented young leaders from all over Latvia, representing different ethnic backgrounds and different regions, giving them an opportunity to meet and develop ideas amongst themselves, and by further introducing them to existing Latvian experts and politicians, the aim is to help them grown their contact networks for future success. During the programme, participants increase their skills in media literacy, public speaking, argumentation, and debate.

Stakeholders

Stakeholders include young people with an interest in politics and social life representing different regions of Latvia and different ethnical backgrounds. The main target group are the active young students from different regions and fields of study in Latvia.

Industry experts, representatives of government and media provide workshops, discussion sessions, and mentoring prior to the final project to support the participants of the program.

Alumni provide networking, share experiences, and participate in the sessions with their perspectives on topics.

The embassy of Sweden in Latvia provides collaboration on helping the young leaders understand the role of diplomacy and the importance of regional cooperation and cooperation on the final project of the participants.

Other higher education institutions provide support in the dissemination of the call for participants.

NGOs focused on youth critical thinking and debate provide workshops on critical thinking and argumentation, with practical debate style training and expert lectures, as well as media training on issues of freedom of expression, independent media, information and media awareness and literacy.

The Chancellery of the president of Latvia and various ministries of Latvia are invited as speakers, providing mentoring and networking to support the programme.

Media representatives provide workshops on media literacy, interview skills and how to get a message featured in the media.

2. Implementation

Input

The programme is financially supported by the Swedish embassy in Latvia, through a grant from the Swedish Institute which has to be applied for yearly. The financial input goes to cover the salaries of the FLA Director as well as administrative staff, and other representatives of the SSE. A small portion of the financial input goes to cover speakers' fees associated with targeted workshops. However, primarily, the speakers who accept an invitation to participate in the program do so free of charge. As such, the largest input in the program are the personal relationships already developed with the speakers and various government representations, as well as the reputation developed by the program.

The primary external resources are the speakers invited by SSE to the workshops and discussion forums.

The location for the sessions and seminars is provided by the SSE Riga. The program, through the financial input of the Swedish Institute, funds the expenses of those participants taking part in the program from outside of Riga. Their accommodation and transport expenses are reimbursed by the program.

Strategies and Activities

The first action taken each new year by the staff associated with the program is an application for funding, which has to be submitted yearly to the Swedish Institute. It entails establishing a plan of action for the planned "Future Leaders Academy" of that year.

Once funding is confirmed, then the call for applications is issued. This usually takes place during the summer. Then the Director and the staff of the program conduct outreach to various universities and NGOs, as well as other youth information resources, and work to disseminate the information about the program.

Once applications are received, then strategic decisions have to be made about which twenty applicants to accept. The review committee has to meet and review all

applications and all videos and then make the decision on participants. The participants then have to be notified and their acceptance to the program confirmed.

Then the work on securing speakers and workshop leaders takes place. As mentioned earlier the program invites public speakers – media representatives, political leaders, societal activists, and other experts in order to share their expertise – to participate in discussions with the young participants, answer their questions and host workshops. Each weekend is dedicated to a certain topic relevant to the participants, during the meetings participants have the opportunity to exchange their ideas, concerns and thoughts with fellow groupmates and invited experts.

The programme consists of five modules and is held over five weekends. Training modules are provided by business etiquette specialists, journalists, political leaders etc., and include argumentation and critical thinking training, public speaking and media literacy training. During the programme “Future Leaders’ Academy” participants have the opportunity to develop a group project – idea pitches for Latvian future development.

The intended purpose is an increased the political activity of future Latvian leaders who will be willing and able to speak about issues of concern, gather popular support for reforms, and propose new solutions to local and global problems, which Latvia is facing currently and may face in the near future. By bringing together talented young leaders from all over Latvia, giving them an opportunity to meet and develop ideas amongst themselves, and further introducing them to current Latvian experts and politicians, the aim is to help them grow their contact networks for future success.

The Director and administrative staff are responsible for inviting the political, social, and institutional authorities, who take the role of the invited speakers and experts, scheduling the program and selecting the participants.

Work sessions happen on weekends, meetings are held in the SSE building, in the case when participants have to work on the final project, the FLA provides a venue for participants to stay for work. The project is further presented at the national conversation festival LAMPA, where different speakers from various institutions discuss actual societal issues.

Coordination with the Target Groups

The communication with the experts and participants is performed by the Director of the programme. Before the start of the project, the open call for applications is issued for about three months before the start of the program. The advertisement is placed in all social media accounts associated with the SSE Riga. Invitation to disseminate the information and to nominate their acquaintances who fit the target profile of the program is sent to all Future Leaders Academy alumni. Invitations to disseminate the information to students are sent to all Latvian universities. Personalized e-mail invitations to nominate students, or to encourage students to apply, are sent to all Latvian university professors of political science, sociology, European studies, and other relevant fields and well to all university student unions, to all youth branches of political parties in Latvia and politically active NGO's. Invitation to apply to the program is disseminated by the organizers of the Latvian Youth Saeima to all former Youth Saeima participants. A press release to the media is issued, informing about the program and the application procedure.

A special Facebook page for the program has been created, and there are currently already interested potential participants for 2022 following the page and news.

During the programme, the administrative staff regularly communicate the progress through Facebook page posts, SSE Riga news items, and in instances of the President's visit or high-level meetings with Ministers, through specially issued press releases with photographs.

The target group is made aware of the program, its benefits, speakers, and training. The main communication channels are social media and email.

Deliverable Outputs

The tangible output of the program is a concrete idea about the future of Latvia's development, that the young leaders can further develop, and in the summertime present at the national conversation festival LAMPA. During the program, the participants have the opportunity to split into groups and work on an idea that is of interest to them and that they want to popularize. In the final session, they present their idea pitches, and one idea is selected to be developed further and to represent

the group at the conversation festival LAMPA, where SSE Riga then provides a stage and a time slot.

The other outputs are intangible, such as developed networks and collaboration on future initiatives. The project helps young people to meet, exchange opinions and brainstorm for a potential joint project for the improvement of community welfare. The outputs are rather intangible such as ideas, network, the professional success of participants etc.

Intangible Outputs

As the result of the group project (aka final project) the participant yearly develops at least three Latvian future development idea pitches and presented them during the final program weekend. These ideas could then be further developed as presentations for the yearly conversation festival LAMPA, or as projects, the young leaders can further grow and develop with mentorship from the SSE Riga and the Embassy of Sweden in Latvia. This output/result would validate the objective of greater exchange and cooperation between agents for change and opinion leaders.

The participants representing minority groups feel greater inclusion and a greater sense of ownership of the future development of Latvia. They feel closer ties with other like-minded Latvian speakers. This output is directly related to the objective of greater inclusion of vulnerable groups.

3. Evaluation and Impact

Strategical Initiatives for Evaluation & Monitoring

The program uses both qualitative and quantitative indicators to evaluate its success of the programme and its ability to meet the various objectives.

- Program evaluation forms. Those have a qualitative and quantitative component and are filled in twice during the programme. Participants are asked to rate the lecturers; later only highly rated speakers are invited to return. The qualitative part of the form asks the participants to self-assess, to gauge their own personal development, what they have gained, and how the program has helped them change.
- Participant participation in the alumni network after the completion of the program. The future success of the participants: the program keeps track of the graduates through an alumni network.
- Alumni survey: conducted every few years. Many alumni stated how much the program has changed their outlook and career path, and how they have become more assertive and involved in what is happening around them.

Analysing the Impacts of the Outputs

The participants report an increased awareness of the issues surrounding public access to objective and independent information and freedom of expression in the media sector. The participants gain new insights and obtain motivation to continue or start a new path in their life. After sessions with the expert of a field most relevant to each participant, it becomes clearer if it is the right for them. Their experiences are shared via social media and other communication platforms, thus making others aware of such a program and of the efforts made to encourage young people to take an active part in Latvia's future development.

The project participants have two-way communication with the current leaders of Latvia. During informal sessions with a question-and-answer approach, the existing leaders of Latvia have the opportunity to hear the concerns and thoughts of the

younger generation and exchange ideas. Thus, the new generation is introduced into the various sectors of society leadership and is able to establish contacts to use in the future.

The media training and media awareness training modules, it is aimed to stimulate the young leaders to pass the information on to their peers. Serving as conduits for further media training and aiding in dispelling the misinformation war.

Defining major success factors

The main success factors of the programme are:

- The already established working relationships with high-level speakers. For the past two years, the President of Latvia has accepted the invitation of the program to participate as a speaker. As such, being able to advertise the program with the President of Latvia as one of the speakers allows the program to attract the most suitable participants.
- Also, having a high-level patron such as the President of Latvia, also makes it easier to approach and convince other society leaders to take part in the program and speak to the participants.
- The established network, that brings together young, motivated people from different fields, with opportunity for opinion exchange with Latvian political, society and business leaders during the program itself. The high level of participants is an added value in itself and perpetuates the success of the program.
- Recommendation of the program by the alumni, who are highly qualified and regarded young leaders in their respective fields, motivates other qualified applicants.
- Reduced prejudice and hesitancy to contact and interact amongst Latvian speakers and native Russian speakers.
- Greater inclusion of vulnerable groups, such as representatives of mixed families, minorities, and Russian-speaking target groups in the regions in the program.
- Greater exchange and cooperation between agents for change and opinion leaders from various sectors in Latvia, advocating sustainable development,

democracy and gender equality, and decision-makers in the political and business arenas.

- Increased media literacy and awareness. One of the topics that are becoming increasingly important for future leaders is being aware of the various media spheres, understanding fake news and its impact, and being able to form their opinion from reliable information sources.

Lessons Learned

FLA is helping young people interested in political situations to be heard, to meet like-minded peers and experts from politics, media, and other sectors, and establish contacts. Vice-versa FLA is contributing as a communication channel between young people expressing their concerns to actual politicians. Further, the programme case can be expanded with the integration of international politicians and public speakers and experts and discuss challenges at the EU level.

4. Supportive and Influencing Aspects

Identifying the major Strengths and Weaknesses:

The major strength of the programme is in its highly qualified management, thorough selection of invited guests and participants from different fields, as well as its uniqueness, it is the first and only alike programme in Latvia. The primary success factor is the strength of the motivation and commitment of all stakeholder's part. Significant support from the Embassy of Sweden plays an important role in the strong side of the programme. The engagement of the highly qualified media leaders and active Latvian politicians with international experience is also vital for delivering critical feedback, both shaping the case and driving the commitment of the participants during the development of their project.

The wide network of alumni, the SSE community, and the great recognition of the programme support its yearly call. The inclusion of vulnerable groups makes the programme acknowledged among the whole Latvian society.

Opportunity for further development of the programme, that cannot be considered as a weakness but is worth mentioning – inclusion of international perspective from speakers' part, this way the discussion could be held from the perspective of EU level.

Further Challenges:

The program funding has to be renewed on a yearly basis and runs the risk of not being funded for one year, which would impact the existing relationships and established reputation. A long-term endowment, for five or more years of the program, would significantly help alleviate such worries.

Annual risk assessment is an integral part of the programme funding application. The stated challenges are:

- In the time of the Covid19 pandemic the gatherings are restricted. In case of restrictions, the programme cannot be held in person. In such a situation an alternative plan will be implemented, where the program will run remotely and in person when possible.

- The further extension of networking. In case of a shortage of applications, the programme cannot be run. It is unlikely because of the SSE Riga network, the good reputation the program has and the active application rate from previous programs.
- Silent treatment from politicians' side or the unfavourable political climate. In case the programme can't get politicians to speak, it could get speakers from other areas, as well as former politicians.

Another issue the program has struggled with is setting the appropriate age requirement. The program has experimented with taking 18 years old, and up to 27 years old. However, the interests of 18-year-old and 27 years old are no longer the same. As such, it is difficult to pinpoint the exact age group that should be targeted, and the exact amount of experience necessary for participation.

5. Further information

Sustainability Factors:

The sustainability of the initiative is set by the involvement of socially active youngsters, who wish to bring changes and improvement to the community. This initiative is rather different from traditional forms of educational approach, it represents the non-formal educational method when through discussions and workshops participants acquire new knowledge and skills. The involved youngsters, who represent the future active leaders not only on the political stage, but also those who are interested in medicine, law, entrepreneurship, and many other areas gain motivation and insights from the speakers.

At the same time, the speakers gain a young perspective of view. This way happens the sustainable exchange of expertise.

FLA's sustainability is ensured via:

- The participation of 100 alumni, who belong to the SSE Riga network and community, they are regularly invited to SSE Riga open lectures and seminars. During the international conversation festival LAMPA, the Alumni and the participants of the annual program were present in the Swedish Tent.
- Active communication among former and new participants via social media. There is an active Facebook page open to the public for this program, where communication can take place and there is a special closed Facebook Future Leaders Academy Alumni group where information can be exchanged between former participants. The alumni use this forum to communicate to each other interesting opportunities, share news of concern, plan their own reunion events and plan their presentations at the LAMPA festival. Discussions about political events also take place in this social media forum.
- The program has been highly appreciated by the participants themselves and by speakers who are eager to involve themselves with the program on an annual basis.

Transferability

Each year alumni attend the opening session of the annual programme, share their experience with the newcomers, establish contacts, and create a network. The initiative aims to connect future leaders with their inspiration, it is possible for each participant, and each involved stakeholder to obtain new contacts, support, knowledge, or skills from the involved part. Other institutions can adopt a similar concept of an initiative in a similar scope to motivate and impact young people who wish to bring changes to society.

The concept of FLA as bringing together like-minded young people and hosting sessions with agents is transferable to other contexts. The type of participants, agents and target areas are contingent on the type of sector with which partnerships can be developed and the specific problems and interest in addressing. The FLA concept can be transferred to any other area from political and societal, to health, finance, innovation etc., which offers strong validation for the transferability of the approach.

Links:

<https://www.sseriga.edu/future-leaders-academy>

<https://www.facebook.com/SSERigaFLA/>

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