Virtual Job

Overcoming digital upskilling resistance among guidance practitioners

Masterclass 1 – Handout

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About this masterclass

This handout accompanies the first online masterclass of the Virtual Job Community of Practice, held on 29 September 2026. The series brings together employment counsellors, job brokers and guidance practitioners from across Europe to explore how AI, virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) can support career guidance.

Our guest was **Tomás Bulnes**, Innovation Project Manager at Ballymun Job Centre in Dublin. Tomás has more than eight years of experience managing digitalisation projects in different sectors, including facilitation with Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) practitioners using a range of methods and approaches to career guidance.

Session focus

Guidance practitioners who are new to AI, VR and AR tools face several barriers to digital upskilling: low digital confidence, fear of job replacement, difficulties with unfamiliar interfaces, time constraints and reliance on IT support. This masterclass looked beyond the adoption of digital tools. It explored how to integrate digitalisation into career counselling through hybrid models, digital learning and Continuous Professional Development (CPD), and how to encourage clients to take part in hybrid guidance processes, making more effective use of time during face-to-face sessions.

The sections below summarise the background material for the session. Links to all sources are listed at the end.

1. Overcoming resistance to digital upskilling

Our starting points

- There is a natural resistance to digital upskilling. Overcoming it is not a challenge specific to the career guidance sector, and it is not harder for guidance practitioners than for other professionals.
- Resistance to digital upskilling is often seen as resistance to technology, or fear of unfamiliar tools and platforms. It also reflects a change in the way we work.

Questions to reflect on

- Why are we reluctant to change? And in particular, why are we reluctant to change in career guidance practice?
- Does digital upskilling concern only the practitioners who are encouraged to learn new tools and platforms, or does it also affect clients, participants, learners and job seekers?
- How can we engage in digital upskilling in a way that is relevant, effective and smooth, in a fast-changing labour market with constant development of new technologies, job roles and employment policies?

2. How guidance practice has become digital

Do you remember what guidance practice looked like before the Covid-19 pandemic? Seven years ago does not seem long ago, yet the way we work has changed a great deal since then.

Questions to reflect on

- Have you learnt new digital skills since then? For example, cloud-based office environments, video calls with screen sharing, or editing documents with several colleagues at the same time.
- Has this changed the way you plan career guidance sessions with your clients or learners?
- Considering the learning curve of recent years, do you feel more comfortable adopting new technology now that you have learnt so many new tools?
- How are you getting on with AI?

Key perspectives

"UNESCO supports Member States to harness the potential of AI to achieve the Education 2030 Agenda while using a human-centred approach. It focuses on AI's role addressing inequalities regarding access to knowledge, research and diversity of cultural expressions to ensure it does not widen technological divides within and between countries."

UNESCO, Digital education: what you need to know

"The economy will continue to experience changes in the future due to global trends reflecting the impact of digitalisation, automation, and, in particular AI. Over the last year, it has also become clear that the pace of change will accelerate significantly due to the steep improvement rates of Large Language Models and the dissemination of AI technologies."

The Institute of International and European Affairs (IIEA), Skills in the Digital Age

3. The need to digitalise and to keep on training

Modernising our working systems brings challenges and costs. Even so, we need to adapt our routines to new working environments and adopt new technologies to keep up with labour market trends, stay compatible with other services, and follow national and European digitalisation policies.

- The Covid-19 pandemic opened the possibility of remote and hybrid work across many sectors.
- Data security requirements pushed services to move to cloud-based systems.
- Inter-agency referrals and shared databases are now essential within digital public service platforms.
- Accessibility, quality customer service and fair procedures are now largely delivered online. Fair accessibility therefore also requires digital literacy upskilling.

The European Digital Competence Framework (DigComp) "describes what is needed to be digitally competent in today's society, and supports the development of digital competence among individuals of all ages."

We have known all this for years. Yet when we think about it, many of us have not fully integrated these changes, and still feel overwhelmed by how quickly technology has disrupted our routines. Perhaps the answer is to accept that we will not always know everything, and to embrace continuous training as part of the job.

4. What the Virtual Job research found

At the start of the project, the Virtual Job partners carried out a needs analysis, including interviews with more than 100 guidance practitioners in six countries (Austria, Ireland, Lithuania, Spain, Sweden and Ukraine). These are the main trends.

AI-supported services

AI-supported services are now used in all the European countries studied, including customised job-matching systems and chatbots that provide career information or help users prepare applications. In most countries, these tools are part of Public Employment Service platforms or educational guidance systems, and are designed to support professional counselling rather than replace it.

Augmented reality

AR currently plays only a minor role in career guidance. AR applications are mainly linked to broader immersive learning environments, technical simulations and innovation projects. AR is rarely used as a standalone guidance technology and remains experimental in most countries.

Virtual reality and digital platforms

VR is used mainly for career exploration. Users can experience workplaces, simulate job tasks or explore training environments. Digital career information platforms and self-assessment tools are also widely used. They provide labour market information, occupational profiles and skills assessments, allowing users to explore career options independently. These applications are especially common in vocational guidance and are often aimed at young people.

Practitioners' preparedness

Counsellors in all countries reported high awareness of AI-driven recruitment systems, automated CV screening, algorithmic matching and digital career tools. However, levels of preparedness vary significantly. Sweden and Austria show comparatively strong institutional support and professional training, while practitioners in Spain, Ireland, Lithuania and Ukraine often rely on self-learning and experimentation.

5. Digitalisation and the career guidance approach

Career guidance is specialised, human-centred support. We should therefore reflect on the advantages and limitations of digitalisation, and on how effectively technology can support different parts of the guidance process.

Resistance to digital upskilling among guidance practitioners may not be about adopting technology as such. It may come from the extra challenge of using technology with clients,

job seekers or VET learners who have low digital literacy, including people without adequate access to technology because of a disadvantaged background, living in a rural area, or lacking an internet connection or a device.

Face-to-face Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) usually supports a more personalised service and helps build trust and confidence. Each person can be supported through a tailored approach before profiling tools or external platforms are introduced, so that these do not distract from the trust built in person.

Question to reflect on

- Do you agree? Where does the digital part fit best in your practice: before, between or during face-to-face sessions?

6. A changing labour market

Career guidance and employment services are not only being urged to adopt newer technologies. There is also pressure from the wider environment, including private sector trends, which in turn inform policy and require us to adjust how we support job seekers and VET learners. Further pressures towards digitalisation include:

- Recruitment processes streamlined through AI filtering of keywords and algorithms that shortlist candidates for popular vacancies.
- Skills shortages and risks of job loss in sectors with high turnover, also affected by investment shifts and technological progress.
- Updated job specifications requiring experience with AI in many roles, with employees and candidates expected to upskill quickly.
- Self-directed learning and intuitive platforms available to support Continuous Professional Development (CPD), including innovative projects such as Virtual Job.

> *"The jobs created are equivalent to 14% of today's employment. Alongside, 92 million roles will be displaced by these same trends. This means there will be a net employment increase of 78 million jobs."*
>
> World Economic Forum, Future of Jobs Report 2025

> *"The integration of AI into self-directed learning environments is transforming how students engage with their education programs. By providing personalized feedback, fostering critical thinking, and shifting the role of educators, AI can empower learners to take greater ownership of their educational journeys."*
>
> The future of AI in education (2025)

Watch: Learning Studio – AI in Recruitment Explained: Resume Screening and Hiring Automation (3-minute video)

7. Barriers beyond motivation

Discussing why we resist change is interesting, but looking at the concrete barriers to digitalising our working routines helps us understand why upskilling is not simple. Beyond the motivation to learn, guidance practitioners face these additional barriers:

- **Data protection and privacy.** GDPR compliance is a major concern in guidance practice.
- **Ethical and responsible use of AI.** Compliance with the EU AI Act must be ensured.
- **Cost and inclusion.** Technologies such as VR and XR require additional investment in software and hardware that is out of reach for some communities and services, particularly in the public and voluntary sectors. Both practitioners and job seekers also need digital literacy upskilling before they can start using them.
- **Rapid obsolescence.** Fast-changing technology means platforms and tools quickly become obsolete. Time spent learning a technology can feel wasted when it is no longer valid or has to be replaced by a new system.

Sources and further reading

- UNESCO – Digital education: what you need to know
- IIEA – Skills in the Digital Age
- European Commission JRC – The Digital Competence Framework (DigComp)
- World Economic Forum – Future of Jobs Report 2025
- The future of AI in education (2025), Social Innovations Journal
- Learning Studio – AI in Recruitment Explained (video)
- European Commission – Data protection (GDPR)
- EU Artificial Intelligence Act

Keep the conversation going

This masterclass is the first of a series of twelve. We invite you to bring your reflections, examples and questions to the next masterclass and to your local sessions, where you can explore them with colleagues in your own context.