

Entrepreneurship and Digital Transformation at Riga Business School, Latvia



Key insights in summary

Riga Business School (RBS) offers business education at undergraduate, graduate and post-graduate level, following a North American style and teaching entirely in English. Entrepreneurship is a core element, which is thoroughly encouraged in its offerings. Digital transformation is mainly addressed in the Computer Science and Organisational Technologies programme. The School offers substantial outreach programmes for secondary students in order to foster their entrepreneurial thinking before going to university and in order to attract very bright students to RBS.

1. RBS's profile and entrepreneurial approach

Riga Business School is part of Riga Technical University, situated in Latvia's capital. It was founded in 1991 by the State University of New York in Buffalo (USA) and the University of Ottawa (Canada). It was the first higher education institution in the Baltics to offer an MBA course in English and in a North American style, granting international accreditation. **All courses are presented in English** and internationally accredited, preparing students for international positions. The degrees on offer are Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA), Bachelor of Computer Science and Organisational Technologies, Professional Master of Business Administration (MBA) and Executive MBA. A broad offer of English courses complements the academic portfolio.¹ Currently approximately 500 students are enrolled in degree granting courses.

The School's operations are entirely funded by tuition fees, which can be reduced by company-funded scholarships.² Apart from the two funding university partners (Buffalo and Ottawa), further sponsors include the Canadian Development Agency, the American-Latvian Association, the Companies of Epson, CISCO, SEB and Energolukss (Latvian power supplier) as well as the University's alumni association.³

RBS's entrepreneurial approach is closely linked to regional development in the Baltics and inspired by North American methods. Above all, many classes include hands-on projects closely tied to the local economy, fostering practical entrepreneurial thinking and acting. Within this approach, RBS considers digital transformation as a determining factor for future leaders and as a vehicle for effective teaching. This case study focuses on how RBS is fostering entrepreneurship through an international and digitally enhanced environment. A specific subject is how RBS develops remarkably strong links with secondary school students.

¹ See <http://www.rbs.lv/about-rbs/about-rbs>.

² See <http://www.rbs.lv/BBA scholarships>.

³ See <http://www.rbs.lv/about-rbs/sponsors>.

2. Entrepreneurship as a top priority at RBS

An overview about entrepreneurial offers at RBS

Entrepreneurship is at the very core of RBS’s self-understanding and goes beyond the portfolio of business courses. The school’s vision is to educate responsible leaders to foster sustainable development in Latvia and the Baltics. Since 2018, RBS has re-oriented its profile from educating business leaders in the post-soviet context towards combining IT and management education. . Enabling leaders to understand and manage processes in a digitised economy is the core mission of the Computer Science and Organisational Technologies programme. This Bachelor’s degree is the core piece of RBS’s digital transformation strategy, aiming at educating tech-savvy leaders.

Another unique feature of RBS’s approach is to develop an entrepreneurial mindset already in teenagers through various programmes reaching out to high schoolers. As illustrated by *Figure 1*, RBS’s entrepreneurial ecosystem involves offers for secondary students, RBS students and the broader community. This first category aims at awakening high schoolers’ interest in entrepreneurship, in an engaging manner. Offers for RBS students aim at enabling them to develop real businesses and entrepreneurial thinking. Projects reaching out to the wider community seek to help young adults to develop their entrepreneurial talents.

Figure 1: Components of RBS’s entrepreneurial ecosystem

Secondary Students		
 One-week business bootcamp for final year high school students	Silicon Valley Challenge Bachelor admission test based on real enterprise challenges	 Business simulation game in cooperation with Junior Achievement Latvia
RBS24 Business development workshops for high school student companies in cooperation with Junior Achievement Latvia	High school workshops Entrepreneurial workshops delivered in high schools	
RBS Students		
Entrepreneurship Specialisation Series of workshops and lectures on different entrepreneurship models	 Public defence of entrepreneurial theses	First Year Seminar First year students work on a real company problem
Community		
 Coaching programme for young adults		

Source: <http://www.rbs.lv/bachelor>, own display

Entrepreneurship directed at secondary students and community

RBS explicitly targets secondary students, aiming at creating a long-term relationship with potential students. The benefit for RBS is identifying and attracting very talented young people who already have a clear understanding of entrepreneurship and leadership when they begin their studies.

One remarkable feature is the **L-Earn Business Camp**. In collaboration with the SEB Bank, this event addresses high school students with a week-long authentic business challenge, which generally involves digital solutions. Participants compete for a full scholarship for RBS's BBA or Computer Science and Organisational Technologies programme.⁴

Furthermore, RBS supports the **TITAN Business Strategy Game** by Junior Achievement Latvia (JAL), which is a company simulation for teenagers.⁵ The School offers business webinars to provide background knowledge for the participants. Another cooperation with JAL, the **RBS 24 StartUp Workshop**, is directed at participants in student learning companies. This ties in with the Company Programme by Junior Achievement Europe, in which 15-18-year-olds solve a community problem through a business venture they develop throughout the academic year.⁶ Twice per year, RBS holds a workshop to assist participants from all over Latvia in developing their business models and pitches for investors, provide feedback on their business ideas and prepare for the Latvian final of the competition. Pitches are assessed by a jury with representatives from Latvian businesses and RBS faculty.⁷ The top three students in the final test are awarded a 10% tuition discount on the first year of study at RBS.⁸ Finally, another offering for secondary students is **tailor-made in-school workshops** on topics such as business projects and leadership.⁹

To aspiring students, the entrepreneurial orientation of the School is already conveyed through the Bachelor admission exam, which is named **Silicon Valley Challenge**. In this challenge, aspiring students have to solve various exercises testing their ability to perform in a modern working environment. This includes entrepreneurial thinking in business cases. The tasks are oriented towards global demands in the job market and are developed jointly with business partners, for example Air Baltic. Topics include IQ, honesty, leadership, team building, curiosity, cultural awareness, energy level and social responsibility.¹⁰

With regard to the broader community, RBS is a founding organisation of the **Go Beyond** programme in cooperation with partners such as the International Coach Federation (Latvia), the City of Riga and businesses including biotechnology company AbbVie. The scheme entails a ten-month coaching programme developing leadership in 18-23-year-old adults from all over Latvia, including workshops and open guest lectures. Participants work on individual as well as on group projects.¹¹

Entrepreneurship offer for RBS students

With existing RBS students, an opportunity to gain experience in intrapreneurship is the **First Year Seminar**. Incoming students divide into teams and work on a problem from a corporation or municipality,

⁴ See <http://www.rbs.lv/learn>

⁵ See <http://www.rbs.lv/titan/>

⁶ See <http://coyc.jaeurope.org/about/ja-company-programme.html>.

⁷ See <http://www.rbs.lv/news/students-learn-presentation-skills-rbs24-2020-start-workshop>.

⁸ See <http://jalatvia.lv/bnews/global/825>.

⁹ See <http://www.rbs.lv/bachelor/high-school-students/workshops>

¹⁰ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LapxerINWuc>

¹¹ See <https://www.gobeyond.lv/>.

applying the skills learned in other subjects to complex real-world situations. At the end, students present their results to the client.

These qualities are further challenged in the classes of the **Entrepreneurship Specialisation** module in the BBA programme. In this optional module, students work in teams creating a model enterprise throughout two semesters, working out crucial aspects like marketing, finance, research, and operations in practice. While the first part of the course is dedicated to solving regional business challenges, the second part aims at supporting students in their own business ventures. Growing students with an entrepreneurial mindset is the explicit goal.¹²

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In the Bachelor programme Computer Science and Organisational Technologies, students develop a prototype IT solution for a community problem through their first semester. This work requires them to combine entrepreneurial thinking with intense coding.

In the other study programmes, the focus on business case studies in the classroom fosters the students' entrepreneurial thinking. Intensive case studies, group work and active classroom involvement over at least two years of studies are an important part of North American teaching standards and structure.¹³ As RBS lecturer William Schaub says in the School's clip "Skills for the future labour market": "What we do is [...] push students together to solve market problems. [...] And it's the core of any activity you see here."¹⁴

Another way in which RBS brings practical business experience to its students is a **mentorship programme** that matches pairs of students and experienced RBS alumni in several networking events. Likewise, high level business practitioners are brought into the classroom regularly, also as part of the "back to school" programme offering courses for RBS alumni.¹⁵

3. How RBS combines entrepreneurship and digitisation

Fostering a digital culture as a means for innovation and entrepreneurship

Riga Business School leverages digital transformation for entrepreneurship in diverse ways. Part of its mission is to prepare leaders for information technology-based careers.¹⁶ Using IT infrastructure to enhance its teaching has been part of its methods throughout the past decade.

This is most obviously expressed in its curriculum contents, which have been increasingly oriented towards IT driven business opportunities since 2018. The **Bachelor programme Computer Science and Organisational Technologies** is a four-year course that combines business, IT and general education classes and that aims at creating highly qualified computer science leaders. After the second year, students choose one specialisation each in computer science (artificial intelligence and data

¹² RBS (2018) PRME Report 2018. Available at: <https://www.unprme.org/reports/PRMEreportinPDF2017final.pdf>. Access: 30.03.2020. See <http://www.rbs.lv/startup-lab>

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QOO_3RShp11

¹⁵ RBS (2018) PRME Report 2018. Available at: <https://www.unprme.org/reports/PRMEreportinPDF2017final.pdf>. Access: 30.03.2020.

¹⁶ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xKwmMETvvgM>

representation or algorithms and computer security) and business (finance or general management). IT classes are taught by lecturers from the engineering department, making up at least 40% of the individual curriculum. The programme is organised in cooperation with Riga Technical University, University of Latvia and the State University of New York at Buffalo.¹⁷ By incorporating an engineering degree in a business school, RBS fosters leaders who are able to use their IT and management knowledge to digitally transform their organisations.

Another programme combining business and IT is the **Professional MBA**, when chosen with an IT specialisation. It aims at preparing leaders of companies in which new technologies play a key role.

Digital transformation in entrepreneurship is a recurrent topic also in the other courses. One example are selected BBA **bachelor thesis defences** from 2018, of which recordings are available online. Regulation of cryptocurrencies, film piracy, robotics process automation and automotive software are some of the presented topics, which indicate a high level of awareness of digital transformation among graduates.¹⁸

In addition, RBS supports the **Tech Business Centre** of the Investment and Development Agency of Latvia (LIAA). The project fosters an innovative entrepreneurial ecosystem in Latvia through fast prototyping of tech-intensive products and services, bringing together students and intrapreneurs. Within this initiative, the school offers an innovation academy which prepares students from RBS and other universities for successfully prototyping digital solutions.

Digital teaching, learning and assessment practices at RBS

In the past ten years, RBS has fostered digital competencies by encouraging online lectures and lessons transmitted from partner universities in the USA, Canada, and Norway. Since 2011, Riga Business School has a high definition **video auditorium** equipped with three screens, three high definition screens and cameras and voice activated microphone for each of the 60 seating spaces.

This structure allows an immersive experience to lecturers and audience, both on site and remote, when recording and transmitting lectures. Live lectures from abroad via videoconference are also a common feature at RBS. Accordingly, switching to 100% online teaching during the COVID-19 crisis went smoothly. The space was sponsored by alumni.¹⁹ Staff has been receiving intense training on the use of this digital infrastructure and has been exclusively using the learning management system to communicate with students. Ongoing support is provided to enhance the lecturers' online presentation skills.

Regarding students' personal development beyond the classroom, RBS is currently building the **GoBeyondX** platform, which aims at enhancing students' soft skills and critical thinking. This is a cooperation with Riga Technical University Faculty of Humanities and STACC (machine learning and data science company from Estonia). An app will identify an individual soft skill profile as a pathway for related growth during students' university life. The app will use machine learning to analyse data from the activities in which the participants take part. Thus, RBS is engaged in leveraging ICT to develop leadership skills beyond pure business purposes.

¹⁷ See <https://www.bitl.lv/?lang=en>

¹⁸ See Riga Business School's YouTube Channel at <https://www.youtube.com/user/LifeatRBS/videos> Access: 30.03.2020.

¹⁹ See <http://www.rbs.lv/bachelor>

Internationalisation and digitisation

RBS has a highly international profile. Apart from the class language, the international profile becomes evident in the option to combine the Bachelor programmes with a final year at BI Norwegian Business School or at the University of Buffalo, obtaining double degrees²⁰. This international connection is leveraged through digital tools, such as the infrastructure enabling to transmit lectures from the partner universities abroad. Moreover, all teaching staff has international and corporate experience. For instance, faculty for the Computer Science and Organisational Technologies programme was trained at the University at Buffalo.

RBS's digital presence for supporting its activities

RBS is present on **different social media platforms**, giving a thorough glimpse into its activities. The YouTube channel features lecture and event recordings, image films and presentation of student projects. The available media are varied and engaging, showcasing various aspects of RBS's structure.²¹ Its Twitter account counts more than 1,000 followers and lists tweet updates on upcoming events and admission processes.²² More followers can be found on the School's Facebook account (approximately 5,000 likes)²³, LinkedIn page (2,800 followers)²⁴ and Instagram account (477 followers)²⁵. The alumni group on LinkedIn counts 678 members.²⁶

All channels are **frequently updated**, although information is somewhat scattered among the pages.

Source

This case study was prepared by Carola Schulz and Dr Stefan Lilischkis from empirica Gesellschaft für Kommunikations- und Technologieforschung mbH, Bonn, Germany, through collection and analysis of broad documentation about Riga Business School.

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Key links

<http://www.rbs.lv/>

Riga Business School (2018): Developing sustainable leadership. Sharing information on progress report 2018. PRME. Available at: <https://www.unprme.org/reports/PRMEreportinPDF2017final.pdf>

<https://www.youtube.com/user/LifeatRBS>

²⁰ ibid

²¹ See <https://www.youtube.com/user/LifeatRBS>

²² See https://twitter.com/RBS_LV

²³ See <https://www.facebook.com/RigaBusinessSchool>

²⁴ See <https://www.linkedin.com/school/riga-business-school>

²⁵ See https://www.instagram.com/riga_business_school

²⁶ See <https://www.linkedin.com/groups/57454>