

Minutes of the expert groups

Brussels, 9/10/2020

Minutes
12th ESCO Member States Working Group
and
33rd ESCO Maintenance Committee
Joint info session
9/10/2020, Brussels

1 Opening of the meeting

1.1 Approval of the agenda and of the minutes of the previous meeting

The agenda of the meeting was approved with no further comments.

The Commission (COM) informed members of the Member States Working Group on ESCO (MSWG) and the Maintenance Committee (MAI) that the minutes of the 11th meeting of the ESCO Member States Working Group and the 32nd meeting of the ESCO Maintenance Committee had been circulated and no comments had been received. All action points included in the minutes from the last meeting were implemented.

1.2 Nature of the meeting

The meeting was non-public and held online via WebEx conference call.

COM chaired and opened the meeting and welcomed the participants.

COM introduced Jan Luts and Laura Andolfi as new members of the ESCO team.

COM welcomed MSWG and MAI members participating for the first time.

COM introduced the agenda and the purpose and structure of the meeting. The agenda was adopted.

COM announced the proposed dates for the upcoming meetings of the MAI (22 October 2020) and the MSWG (5 November 2020).

All the presentations and documents from the meeting are available in the [ESCO Portal](#).

1.3 Update on European skills policy points

COM introduced the latest developments in European skills policy, notably the updated EU Skills Agenda which was adopted on 1 July 2020 and the launch of Europass on the same date. COM explained that the EU Skills Agenda and other instruments adopted on that date have a clear message on skilling for jobs, which is important for the ESCO community to take as the main message from those policy initiatives. COM to press forward with initiatives that can put

the spotlight on the way in which people have the opportunity to develop their skills for jobs. COM also explained that this is the red thread running through the proposed VET Recommendation, the Youth employment support initiative and the EU Skills Agenda itself. COM added that ESCO is at the heart of this policy with its bridging function between the education-training area and the labour market, supporting competence-based job matching, supporting reflection on targeted training and a quick change in the labour market.

2 Thematic block 1: ESCO version 1.1

COM presented an update on the preparation of ESCO version 1.1, focusing on the following topics:

- Objectives of ESCO version 1.1
- The current update process and its different sources.
- An overview of the new content created so far.
- The proposed timing and methodology for the consultation with Member States on the new content for ESCO v1.1.

Main points during the subsequent discussion were as follows:

- Participants asked how the work on curricula and qualifications relate to the responsibility of Europass for the qualifications pillar.

COM clarified that the information about qualifications can be found in Europass as of July 1st. Since that date the qualifications pillar is no longer available in ESCO. However, this does not change the goal of ESCO to help bridging the labour market with education and training. An example of this continued commitment is the ongoing pilot for the learning outcome linking service, which uses artificial intelligence (AI) to support the linking of qualifications with ESCO skills.

In Europass some features are still in development and will be improved in next versions. One example is the search functionality which was launched as a beta version.

- Participants asked whether in ESCO v1.1 the green, digital, and STEM skills will be recognisable for users.

COM believes that the different skills hierarchies which are currently available, already help to make the distinction. More can be done in this regard and COM proposed to discuss this further in the upcoming MAI meeting.

- Participants asked to share the proposed new skills and occupations with the MAI as far in advance as possible as part of the quality assurance process.

COM confirmed that the new content will be shared in view of the next MAI meeting (22 October 2020).

- Participants asked where the 21st century skills are positioned in the 12 activities of the EU Skills Agenda.

COM clarified that targeted initiatives can be found throughout the Skills Agenda in actions on green and digital skills (action 6), STEM, entrepreneurial, transversal (action 7), and “skills for life” (action 8). Moreover this is a red thread in other actions such “the Pact for Skills”, the “Individual Learning Account”, etc.

- Participants mentioned that the new ESCO skills hierarchy added in version 1.0.8 of ESCO works well. It uses the existing ‘broader’ and ‘narrower’ relationship concepts and the hierarchy allows implementers to decide which level of detail to use, e.g. in matching.

3 Thematic block 2: the future role of Artificial Intelligence in ESCO

COM presented considerations for using Artificial Intelligence (AI) in ESCO’s update and maintenance and for providing services to citizens and SMEs. The main topics discussed were:

- The AI-related challenges for ESCO.
- Use cases for AI support to the development of ESCO, illustrated with specific examples.
- Identification of relevant data sources and their importance for the proper training of AI algorithms.
- Early observations of the model currently in development.
- Potential ESCO-based services for citizens and small businesses.

The main points during the subsequent discussion were as follows:

- Participants asked whether it can also be explored to use AI to make the ‘Belgian’ Dutch language version visible and usable for end-users.

COM indicated that on the longer term, data sources in different languages will be used to train language models. This will result in an implicit improvement of recognising the nuances in similar languages when mapping real world data to ESCO terminology.

- Participants asked whether AI algorithms would be trained with data coming only from EU ecosystems.

COM clarified that also non-EU data sources such as for example O*Net can be relevant for training certain aspects of the model.

Participants suggested that, instead of structured, closed, limited datasets such as O*Net, also more open, semantically diverse, real labour market data should be considered. As an example <https://skills.emsidata.com> is mentioned.

- Participants supported the AI focus for the development of ESCO and requested to discuss this more in-depth during upcoming MAI meetings.
- Participants asked whether AI is capable of identifying new occupations.

COM confirmed that this is a use case for AI in ESCO and added that Cedefop is already applying this with the skills OVATE project.

- Participants raised the concern about the importance of quality, quantity and weighting of data sources. For example, using data sources from only a few countries covering a low percentage of the EU labour market would influence/bias the algorithms trained with this data.

COM acknowledged this concern and invited all Member States to support this initiative by making data from their national sources available. This will significantly improve the ESCO model and make ESCO more representative of the European labour market and education-training area.

- COM asked participants whether they can share their experiences with using AI in skills and labour market applications.

Belgium indicated that the Flemish PES VDAB is using AI to analyse job vacancies in the context of updating the national classification ROME/Competent.

- Participants asked whether the EURES portal is included as a data source for AI in ESCO.

COM clarified that job vacancies are being considered as a data source. Reusing job vacancy data from the EURES portal would be ideal.

4 Thematic block 3: ESCO's terminology on transversal skills

Cedefop presented the state of play of the work done by the transversal skills expert group to define a structured and consistent terminology on transversal skills and competences. The main topics discussed were:

- The need for a consistent terminology regarding transversal skills.
- An overview of the approach and the work done by the expert group and its output.
- The definition used for transversal skills and competences.
- The hierarchy (categories and subcategories) of transversal skills as defined by the expert group.

The main points during the subsequent discussion were as follows:

- Participants requested that the work of the transversal skills expert group would be presented at the next MAI meeting so the MAI can review its findings as part of the MAI's quality assurance function.

COM confirmed that this will be addressed during the next MAI meeting (22 October 2020) and that there will also be a workshop probably on how to place the transversal skills clusters within the overall skills hierarchy.

- Participants asked whether 'career management skills' are included in the 'life skills' of the presented taxonomy.

Cedefop clarified that certain categories in the proposed taxonomy are related to career management even though there is no dedicated category for these skills. For example, there is the cluster of 'social skills' which has a finer cluster about negotiation and conciliating, which are relevant in a career management context.

- Participants noted that many of the transversal skills categories overlap with or are the same as categories in the existing skills hierarchy and asked how this will be handled.

Cedefop acknowledged that it is a challenge to make the transversal skills available to the users without creating two different but similar sets of skills in parallel. It is a question of how to contextualise these transversal skills.

COM noted that in the upcoming MAI meeting, a workshop will be dedicated to this topic.

- Participants noted that the language used is rather academic and asked how these transversal skills can be used in practical applications such as filling out a digital profile for matching.

Cedefop clarified that defining the transversal skills and competences is a step by step, iterative process and welcomed any feedback to further improve the set and the language used. The goal is to make a good mix between usability of terminology and literature. Contextualisation of transversal skills is also a way to do this in practice.

COM confirmed that the language needs to be adapted to the different use cases and noted that the use of Non-Preferred Terms (NPT) in ESCO can cover linguistic nuances.

- Participants asked whether the ESCO skills will be mapped to the proposed transversal skills categories and what the foreseen time plan is to include the new transversal structure in ESCO.

COM clarified that this will be addressed in the upcoming MAI meeting. Together with the analysis of the report, we will have a deeper understanding of how to proceed and consequently a timeline will be determined.

5 Next meeting

The next MSWG meeting is tentatively scheduled for 5 November 2020.

The next MAI meeting is tentatively scheduled for 22 October 2020.

Both meetings will be held online but will be structured as regular meetings and might therefore take the whole day.

6 List of participants

COM: DG EMPL Units E.2 and D.1.

Cedefop: Department for VET systems and institutions

MSWG:

- Representatives of 23 Member States: AU, BE, BG, DE, DK, EI, EL, ES, ET, FI, FR, HR, HU, IT, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, PL, RO, SE and SI.
- Representatives of 2 EEA countries: CH and IS.
- Representatives of 2 organisations of social partners: SME United and ETUC.

MAI: Bakker Marcel, Bird Tony, Cerk Tina, Goetschalkx Gerd, Harold Alison, Hunter David, Kikute Lelde, Kovacs Tibor, Mirski Peter, Postavaru Nicolae, Ramombordes Cecile, Ravaioli Simone, Szebeni Kinga, Triganza Clyde, Van der Sanden Karin.