



ESCO (2015) SEC 004 DRAFT

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ESCO communication strategy

Purpose of the document

In this paper the ESCO Secretariat presents a third draft of the ESCO Communication Strategy to the ESCO Board for consultation. It builds on the first draft¹, discussed on the 10th ESCO Board meeting of 25 November 2013 and on the second draft², discussed on the informal 12th ESCO Board meeting of 16 September 2014. The ESCO Secretariat incorporated the results of these discussions and exchanged views with individual board members in phone conferences.

The ESCO Board is invited to comment on the document, so that it can be finalised and published. It will form the basis for the planning of all upcoming communication activities.

1. Objectives

ESCO has the ambition to become the **common reference terminology for an exchange of trusted information between employment, education and training in Europe**. It will be used in systems that provide services to people, such as online job matching, career guidance and labour market intelligence. ESCO will improve these services with the goal to increase geographical and occupational mobility, reduce skills gaps and improve the functioning of the European labour market. Ultimately, this will bring more people in jobs.

¹ ESCO (2013) SEC 070 DRAFT.

² ESCO (2014) SEC 041 DRAFT.



The ESCO strategic framework further outlines the vision, mission, position, added value and guiding principles of ESCO. It explains what we want to achieve, how we will make it happen and who will benefit from it.

These overarching objectives cannot be reached by the Commission alone. If we want to succeed, **we need to build alliances** with stakeholders that participate in recruitment processes, that educate and train people and that provide services to jobseekers, employers and learners.

2. ESCO communication cycle

Effective communication is the critical factor for the success of ESCO. We have to rely on the expertise of stakeholders and seek their support in building ESCO so that the final product suits their needs. This ensures that the final product provides value and benefits our stakeholders. Only then, ESCO will be voluntarily adopted by the market participants and finally become a *de facto* standard. It is therefore crucial to involve stakeholders at an early stage, so that we build ESCO in a joint effort.

The ESCO communication strategy captures these communication needs and translates them into specific needs for communication and stakeholder engagement during the development of ESCO.

The ESCO communication strategy is rooted in the **strategic framework**. The strategic framework³ describes the vision, mission, position, added value and guiding principles of ESCO. It is the basis for the "**ESCO story**". When communicating to various stakeholders in different phases of the project, we can focus on different parts of the ESCO story. Nonetheless, all these messages are part of one consistent overarching story line. Even though the ESCO story is not yet fully developed, some of its key elements are spelled out in ch. 3 of this document.

Also deriving from the strategic framework is a set of principles guiding ESCO communication activities. These **guiding principles** are listed in ch. 4 of this document.

Communication needs to happen during the four phases of the **ESCO communication cycle**, which is shown in figure 1 below. This cycle consists of 4 phases:

- In the "listen" phase, we need input and feedback from our stakeholders in order to understand how ESCO can be improved.
- In the "learn" phase we process this information and discuss changes to the scope of ESCO.
- In the "build" phase we need to make sure that our communication activities contribute to a well-coordinated development of ESCO.

³ ESCO (2015) SEC 002 DRAFT.

- In the “market” phase we aim to convince potential users of the added value of ESCO and help them to make use of it.

The ESCO story and the guiding principles need to be applied in each of these four phases in order to communicate with specific groups of stakeholders. Ch. 5 of this document analyses for each of these four phases the specific communication objectives, the key stakeholders, key messages and the main communication instruments.

During all phases the communication activities can be supported by a **communication toolbox**, consisting of information on communication channels and reusable communication products. An initial list of useful communication channels and products is provided in ch. 6 of this document.



Figure 1: ESCO communication cycle

3. ESCO story

The strategic framework details the vision, mission, position, added value and guiding principles for the ESCO project. The "ESCO story" translates this into a consistent overarching message that is valid for stakeholders and for all communication activities. This is what forms the ESCO brand.



The ESCO story is the basis for developing messages that are targeted to the purpose of the communication, the counterpart and to the communication channel. Even though these messages focus on different parts of the ESCO story, they are part of one overall picture.

The ESCO story encompasses:

Background The background explains the context in which we develop ESCO. It includes major trends and market forces, the macroeconomic situation or technological developments. In the background we can link the development of ESCO to broader political objectives and priorities. From the background it becomes clear, why there is a need for ESCO in the current situation and which problems we intend to solve with it. The background needs to be adapted when the context for the development of ESCO changes.

Promises In the promises we clarify what the main characteristics and features of ESCO are and when they will become available. The promises tell stakeholders what they can expect from us. At the same time, they need to be limited to what we are committed deliver and thus help to manage expectations.

Brand positioning The brand positioning explains what ESCO stands for, how it can be used and what it will help to achieve.

The ESCO story will be developed and fine-tuned over the coming months. An initial summary of the ESCO story is shown in annex I. It will be published, so that it can be a reference point for everyone who wants to communicate about ESCO.

4. ESCO communication guiding principles

Deriving from the ESCO strategic framework, a set of consistent values and principles guide the development of communication messages and activities. These "ESCO communication guiding principles" are listed in the following:



Strategy

Focus on ESCO objectives All ESCO communication activities support the ESCO vision. Their aim is to help achieving the objectives outlined in the strategic framework.

Flexibility Communication with the stakeholders is likely to change over time. Information requests come from different sectors, organisations and stakeholders. At the same time ESCO evolves and the economic and technological context changes. We therefore need to be flexible with our communication and adapt messages, channels and activities to the changing communication needs.

Transparency We will be transparent to the stakeholders and explain how ESCO is being developed. To this end we will publish minutes of ESCO management bodies, clear timelines and documents explaining the methodology of ESCO.

Compliance Whenever the Commission communicates about ESCO, it respects the overall communication guidelines. These include inter alia rules for interaction with stakeholders and press, the Commission brand and rules for online communication⁴.

Position ESCO needs to work complementary with other instruments that enhance interoperability in the labour market and in education and training. These include other classification systems, controlled vocabularies and frameworks, databases with complementary information, technical or syntactical standards, legislation and tools that make use of ESCO to provide services. When communicating about ESCO, we need to be clear about interaction and synergies with other projects and products.

One of the main use cases of ESCO is the data exchange in EURES and the support of the EURES Job Mobility Portal. This does not only require close cooperation between the EURES and the ESCO team. It also includes consistent communication by the two projects. The ESCO story and the EURES story need to be interwoven.

In a similar manner, the EU Skills Panorama and Europass will make use of ESCO. Communication about ESCO and the further development of these tools needs to be consistent.

⁴ Information Providers Guide (<http://ec.europa.eu/ipg>).



The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) makes levels of qualifications comparable throughout Europe. The ESCO terminology can be used in this context to make learning outcomes more transparent across languages. ESCO and the EQF are being developed side by side. When communicating about the use of ESCO in education, this complementary nature of ESCO and the EQF needs to be well explained and highlighted.

Stakeholder management

- Many stakeholders, one story*** Stakeholders need to have a clear and consistent understanding of ESCO and its added value. All messages communicated to stakeholders are rooted in the ESCO story.
- Tailored Messages*** The ESCO story has multiple facets and is communicated by different voices. Therefore, the messages should be targeted to the characteristics of the stakeholders, to the purpose of the communication and to the communication channel.
- Building partnerships*** Stakeholders are key to the success of ESCO. Building strong long lasting relationships with them is critical. We need to listen to their needs and requirements and involve them at an early stage.
- Strive for acceptance and voluntary adoption*** ESCO aims to become a de facto standard by providing an added value and a useful tool for service providers. In our communication we should therefore focus on the potential of ESCO, its usefulness and its voluntary adoption.

Communication messages and channels

- Showcasing*** Since ESCO will unfold its potential through the use in other tools, we have to demonstrate its added value by showing these implementations in other systems. It is difficult to show the benefits of ESCO when looking only at the classification. Its added value becomes tangible only in connection with job matching portals, career guidance tools, statistical information, etc. We therefore adopt an approach of showcasing examples of how ESCO can be used when explaining its added value.
- Using existing channels and structures*** We will avoid creating new communication channels, fora, networks or stakeholder groups, if communication with the target group can be organised through the existing channels. By using national and European structures, information can be disseminated to stakeholders in the right time and format for policy debates and decision-making processes.



Engaging multipliers The ESCO Secretariat and the Commission services cannot directly communicate with all stakeholders. Multipliers such as Social Partners, sector skills councils, professional associations, industry associations and expert groups can help us in disseminating and collecting information. This is not only a resource-efficient way of communicating. It also has the advantage that it is perceived as peer-to-peer rather than a top-down communication. Communication through multipliers is particularly helpful when explaining the added value of ESCO for specific user groups.

Online The ESCO classification is a building block for online services and the semantic web. Communication about ESCO should therefore heavily rely on online communication channels.

5. Communication activities and stakeholder engagement in the four phases of ESCO communication

Communication objectives and the role of the ESCO stakeholders change in each phase of the ESCO communication cycle. The ESCO Board will be consulted in all phases of the ESCO communication cycle and will provide crucial input on the political dimension and for the communication planning.

In order to create a momentum in communication we will rely on **multipliers**, i.e. on people that are engaged with stakeholders and communicate about ESCO to different target audiences. Multipliers will in particular include the members of the four permanent ESCO expert groups (Cross sector reference group, ESCO Board, ESCO Maintenance Committee and the Member State Expert Group) but also the temporary sectoral Reference Groups.

This approach is crucial when targeting stakeholders. Instead of targeting national, regional and sectoral stakeholders separately we will rely on structures on European level, such as European social partners, European professional associations and European industry federations. These organisations can manage the information flow to and from their member organisations.

The ESCO Secretariat and the Commission services that are specialised in communication will therefore not only engage directly in communication activities but also play a coordination role for communication activities that are implemented through multipliers. It is their responsibility to plan, monitor and evaluate the implementation of communication activities.

The following chapter outlines the main communication objectives, the key stakeholders and the communication activities for each of the four phases.



The "listen" phase is the initial step for each ESCO development. Our starting point should always be the stakeholders' requirements, needs and expectations. We need to understand how the stakeholders relate to the overall objectives of ESCO, i.e. what is their view on

these objectives, why are they interested in ESCO and how could they support us to achieve our goals. This is where we start building support for ESCO and long-lasting relationships with stakeholders and build a win-win situation for both parties.

We also need to discuss with potential ESCO users, what the products and services are that they offer and how ESCO could help to make them better. If they are already using ESCO, we want them to feed us back their experiences with it and their ideas how ESCO can be improved. Together with the stakeholders we need to discover the full potential of ESCO and understand how to best develop it further.

Finally, we need to understand what technical and information requirements we should meet, so that stakeholders can easily map to ESCO or use it in applications. This includes e.g. information on required technical formats, documentation and training.

Our key stakeholders in this phase are all those that will be affected by the results of ESCO, but in particular potential users that want to use ESCO to deliver better services.

LISTEN⁵

Key stakeholders

- Member State authorities
- Social partners
- Employment services
- Online service providers, e.g. job portals, social media, CV tools or career guidance tools, HR tools
- Education and training institutes
- Statistical offices
- European tools (EURES, Europass, EU Skills Panorama)
- Bodies developing qualification standards and standardisation bodies

Key messages & objectives

- Convey the ESCO objectives
- Explain the added value of ESCO for those use cases that affect them
- Request information on requirements towards ESCO to make it a useful tool
- Ask for experiences with the use of ESCO and suggestions for further improvement

Communication means

- Dialogue with stakeholders in ESCO Board, ESCO Maintenance Committee and Member State Expert Group
- Bilateral meetings with interested parties
- Presentations at conferences
- Demo applications
- "Fit for purpose" testing, including usability testing
- Data mining and machine learning

⁵ The tables in this chapter list examples of key stakeholders, messages and objectives and communication means. These lists are not exhaustive.



LEARN
Understand, decide and plan how ESCO can be improved

In the "learn" phase we draw our conclusions for the further development of ESCO. Once we understand stakeholders' needs and requirements, we need to translate them into action. This is a learning process in which we need to align requirements with the overall project objectives, to conciliate and balance conflicting

needs and to prioritise. As a result, we identify improvements of ESCO and plan how they can be implemented. Once the Commission took a decision how to improve ESCO (e.g. scope and timeline for an improved release, new use cases or new ways of developing ESCO), the knowledge about these changes needs to be disseminated within the project team.

During this phase we also need to understand what synergies could be developed with other projects, e.g. where work results can be reused or content can be directly imported.

Key stakeholders in this phase are the ones who possess technical expertise how to build and manage classification systems. This in particular includes all people that will contribute to the technical or content development of ESCO.

LEARN

Key stakeholders

- Experts for job matching systems or classification systems
- Commission services developing ESCO, i.e. ESCO Secretariat and service providers (taxonomists, terminologists, IT developers)
- Organisations that manage mappings to ESCO
- Organisations managing related classifications and frameworks (e.g. EQF, eCF, NACE, ISCO, etc.)

Key messages & objectives

- Discuss future features and improvements of ESCO
- Revise or refine the methodology if needed

Communication means

- Discussions in the ESCO Secretariat, the ESCO Maintenance Committee, the Cross-sector Reference Group and in bilateral meetings with technical experts
- Meetings, workshops and collaboration platforms
- Adapting the ESCO guidelines and technical documentation



The "**build**" phase covers the technical ESCO development process of the initial version (ESCO v1) or of future improvements. It includes building the technical systems for managing the classification, improving the contents of the classification, translating

it into all languages and delivering the final product by publishing it on the ESCO portal and including it in the ESCO APIs. It also includes the creation of mappings that are within scope of ESCO (i.e. that are managed by the ESCO team), such as the mappings to ISCO-08 and NACE.

Communication activities in this phase focus mainly on two groups. First, we rely on market experts in order to develop or revise content of ESCO. Social partners, industry associations, sector skills councils, recruiters and education and training institutes contribute online or through expert groups. Second, we need to organise an efficient communication flow between all contributors and developers. This includes many internal stakeholders, such as the development teams, taxonomy experts and terminologists.

Potential users need to be updated on the project progress and the expected scope and target date of an improved version of ESCO.

BUILD

Key stakeholders

- Market experts, including social partners, industry associations, sector skills councils, recruiters and education and training institutes
- Commission services developing ESCO, i.e. ESCO Secretariat and service providers (taxonomists, terminologists, IT developers)
- Potential ESCO users, including public and private employment services, online service providers, social media, EURES, Europass, education and training institutes, statistical offices and EU Skills Panorama

Key messages & objectives

- Gather input from market experts
- Coordinate the development of new ESCO versions
- Inform potential users about future features and the timeline for their development

Communication means

- Content development through Online consultation, Sectoral Reference Groups (until 2015) and Cross-sector Reference Group
- Meetings, workshops and online tools to coordinate ESCO development
- ESCO guidelines and technical documentation
- Systems for collaborative development of the classification (CTC, Jira, ITM, Mapping platform)
- Announcement of new ESCO versions on the ESCO portal and on conferences



In the "**market**" phase, we support the adoption of ESCO by the market. We need to explain the published version of ESCO to potential users and demonstrate to them how it can help them to deliver better services and reach their own objectives. Once users decide to use ESCO, we need to support them in their efforts, in

particular by providing technical support, e.g. technical documentation and coaching how to use ESCO effectively in their use cases. This includes the support to stakeholders that want to map to ESCO (for mappings that are not managed by the ESCO team itself).

Key stakeholders in this phase are those providing products or services that could be improved with ESCO. This includes organisations providing job matching or placement services, career guidance, social networks, statistical information or education and training. Indirectly, it also includes the ones benefiting from better tools and services, i.e. jobseekers, employers and learners. Stakeholders that manage national, regional or sectoral classifications need our support when mapping to ESCO.

Finally, in this phase we should also feed any information to the education and training institutes, that can be used to modernise education and training curricula in line with labour market demands

MARKET

Key stakeholders

- Service providers that will implement ESCO directly in their systems, such as public and private employment services, job boards, career guidance tools, EURES, Europass, statistical organisations, education and training institutes
- Organisations that manage national, regional and sectoral classifications
- Jobseekers, employers and learners
- Education and training institutions

Key messages & objectives

- Explain how ESCO can be used in specific use cases to improve services
- Provide coaching and technical assistance to ESCO users and to organisations mapping to ESCO

Communication means

- ESCO portal
- Presentations at conferences
- Demo applications
- Technical documentation and support addressed to ESCO users

6. Communication toolbox

Communication activities change throughout the ESCO communication cycle. They need to be adapted to the communication objective, the stakeholder and the context. However, since all communication follows the overall ESCO story and is guided by the same principles, we can build strong **communication channels and products** that can be used for several purposes. In many cases, we can use or adapt communication channels and tools that already exist within the Commission. This increases consistency and saves resources. Information on these channels and the reusable communication products will be collected in an **ESCO communication toolbox**, so that it is easy to use. Since communication about ESCO often takes place through multipliers the communication toolbox, including templates, information on the ESCO portal, standard presentations and briefing packs, need to be reusable by them. The toolbox needs to be flexible and respond to different stakeholder needs so that it helps the multipliers to spread the word about ESCO.

The following list of communication channels and products in the ESCO communication toolbox is not exhaustive and will be developed further in the coming months:

Communication channels and opportunities

Presentations at conferences, seminars and other public events at European level

Conferences, seminars, workshops and other public events are a major channel for communications and stakeholder engagement. We should therefore pro-actively identify events, organised by the institutions or by private actors, that are well suited to reach our main stakeholders. Usually, these events focus on a broader political debate in which ESCO is one aspect (e.g. skills gaps, multilingualism, open government data, modernisation of education) or they bring together stakeholders that could become ESCO users (e.g. events targeting job portals, events organised around other European projects such as the EU Skills Panorama or EURES).

National, regional or sectoral ESCO conferences

Dedicated events at national, regional or sectoral level are an excellent opportunity to discuss the implementation of ESCO. They are a good occasion to discuss mappings with national classifications, the application of ESCO in EURES or in national service offers and the added value in a specific context.

Building on the experience with the 2014 German ESCO conference, the upcoming 2015 Italian ESCO conference and 2015 sectoral ESCO event for Hospitality and Tourism in Malta, we can promote the organisation of national ESCO conferences as a best practice, help to develop the agenda and to identify target groups, and participate in presentations and discussions on the day of the event.

ESCO launch events

For major ESCO releases, we will organise launch events with ESCO users and other stakeholders. The purpose is to explain the features and added value of ESCO and to showcase it through pilot implementations.



Political fora ESCO should regularly be presented at relevant political networks, fora and expert groups. This includes inter alia the Employment Committee, the EQF Advisory Group, the EURES Coordination Group and the European Network of Public Employment Services.

Commission websites, ESCO portal and ESCOpedia Basic information on ESCO in the broader political context is disseminated on the web portal of DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. To a limited extent, social media can be used for dissemination in line with the social media strategy of the DG.

The ESCO portal complements this information and is the main communication channel for technical information on ESCO. It offers direct access to the classification, including possibilities to download the complete data set. Furthermore, it provides detailed information in ESCOpedia, an encyclopaedic listing of key concepts in the ESCO development. Through regularly updated news articles, stakeholders get information on the progress of the project.

Other online platforms Basic information on ESCO should be disseminated also through other relevant online platforms. This includes entries on ESCO for example on Joinup⁶, on the European Union Open Data Portal⁷ and on Wikipedia.

News flash We intend to launch a quarterly news flash, which will inform social and education attachés in the Permanent Representations as well as other relevant stakeholders on recent developments in the ESCO project. In future, interested users will be able to subscribe to it via the ESCO portal.

Taxonomy creation and management tools Several tools support the internal communication during the “learn” and “build” phase of ESCO. ESCO's Collaborative Taxonomy Creator (CTC) is the main tool for the creating new content together. The taxonomy management system ITM is used for managing the “stable” version of ESCO. Internal wikis and ticket management systems facilitate the cooperation of distributed teams working on ESCO.

Online consultation Online consultations are a major channel for gathering input on the content of ESCO. On the basis of the existing ESCO architecture, we develop a dedicated online consultation platform. The aim is to make participation for stakeholders easy and straightforward.

Information sessions before and after the online consultation will inform stakeholders of the process and the current state of the draft classification.

⁶ <https://joinup.ec.europa.eu/>.

⁷ <https://open-data.europa.eu/en/data/>.



Help desk A help desk could support ESCO users in technical questions. The need for such a helpdesk service would depend on the actual adoption of ESCO after release of ESCO v1. If many ESCO users start to implement ESCO in their systems, the need for technical information and assistance will increase.

Communication products

Standard presentations and illustrations Templates, standard presentations and illustrations can be adapted for use at several occasions. They can also be reused on the ESCO portal and when developing booklets and hand-outs.

Booklets and hand-outs The ESCO booklet⁸ provides a high-level overview of the ESCO project and is suited for all main stakeholders and occasions. It is available in English, French and German.

In the future it could be complemented by leaflets or hand-outs for a more targeted communication to specific stakeholders. This could e.g. be short leaflets explaining how ESCO can improve job matching, how awarding bodies can enhance learning outcome descriptions by using the ESCO terminology or how the online consultation will be organised.

Job matching game The card-based ESCO job matching game can be used to explain the added value of ESCO for online job matching in an interactive manner. It can be used at meetings, conferences, workshops and seminars.

Key message briefings and standard text modules Speaking points, background information and FAQ can act as reference material when preparing presentations or contributions on ESCO. This material should clearly communicate the business cases, strategy, values and benefits of ESCO. A high quality briefing pack collecting these texts can help the ESCO team and multipliers to prepare presentations on ESCO more efficiently, while at the same time ensuring that a consistent message is delivered.

Technical documentation Technical documentation including the ESCO guidelines, information on ESCOpedia, documentation of the ESCO APIs and terminological guidelines will make it easier for ESCO users to implement ESCO in their systems.

⁸ ESCO, European classification of skills/competences, qualifications and occupations. The first public release: a Europe 2020 initiative. <http://bookshop.europa.eu/en/esco-european-classification-of-skills-competences-qualifications-and-occupations-pbKE0313496/>



Annex I: The ESCO story

The ESCO story

Background

The financial crisis has hit labour markets throughout the European Union. In June 2013 the overall unemployment rate in the EU stood at 11%, while youth unemployment rose to more than 23 % and reached more than 55% in some Member States.

In spite of high levels of unemployment, getting people into work requires tackling skill shortages and mismatches. Workers need training to meet the needs of the labour market and job matching services need to make the most of available employment opportunities.

Nowadays, as information became easily accessible and people communicate with their counterparts in a digital way. However, recipients and senders need to be sure that the exchanged information is understood in the same way. In a multilingual environment this is particularly challenging. Jobseekers and employers need to understand what is meant with the name of an occupation or job title, with a specific task, skill, knowledge, competence, with a qualification and with a description of work context and working conditions. Semantic interoperability is therefore necessary for exploiting the full potential of information technology on the labour market and in the education and training sector.

Less than half of the Member States currently have skills classifications linked to their occupational classifications, therefore a single classification like ESCO therefore helps to bridge barriers in communication that derive from different languages or from the use of different classification systems.

Promises

ESCO is the multilingual classification of European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations. It identifies and categorises skills, competences, qualifications and occupations relevant for the EU labour market and education and training in 25 European languages.

It is based on semantic interoperability, allowing people and organisations to automatically interpret and exchange data using a common *de facto* standard.



ESCO improves job matching platforms, search engines, employment services and education and training institutes.

ESCO has been developed in an open IT format, is available for use free of charge by everyone and can be accessed through an online portal.

Brand positioning

- Facilitate the dialogue between the labour market and the education/training sector.
- Allow employment services to exchange relevant labour market information across borders.
- Boost online and skill-based job-matching.
- Facilitate geographical and occupational mobility.
- Shift employment services towards a skills and competences-oriented approach.
- Describe qualifications in terms of knowledge, skills and competences.
- Modernise career guidance services.
- Optimise employees' assessment by identifying skills gaps and choosing the adequate training that will foster their competences.
- And ultimately: getting more people into jobs throughout Europe.