Introduction to ESCO

1. What is ESCO?

ESCO is a multilingual classification of European Skills/Competences, qualifications and Occupations. ESCO organises concepts that are relevant in the European labour market and in the education/training sector. It will be available free of charge to all stakeholders.

The European Commission is working in close collaboration with stakeholders to develop the ESCO classification. Starting point for the development of ESCO is the EURES classification, which is currently used on EURES, the European Job Mobility Portal.

2. What can ESCO be used for?

Applications performing job matching, identifying skill shortages, providing career guidance or presenting labour market information can use ESCO as a building block. These specific needs will be covered by applications using ESCO, rather than ESCO itself. However, ESCO will facilitate the development and implementation of instruments responding to these needs. The following examples of practical applications illustrate the added value of ESCO:

– Online job portals could use the vocabulary of ESCO for analysing CVs and job vacancies in 22 European languages. The skills/competence pillar of ESCO will allow job matching on the basis of skill sets. Instead of finding job vacancies in a certain occupation, job portals can then find the jobs that best match a jobseeker's individual skill set.

– ESCO will be a European interoperability classification. It can be used to exchange information across borders and language barriers. For example, employment services can exchange job vacancies that are written in different languages, interpret them correctly and use them for online job matching.

– At European level, ESCO will provide for a closer matching of jobseekers to jobs through EURES, the European Job Mobility Portal – as well as facilitate the development of a European Skills Passport.

- Learners could use ESCO to build personal skill profiles and to record their learning outcomes in applications.

- Education and training institutions could use ESCO to improve planning and curriculum development. ESCO will allow them to react quicker on emerging skill needs.

3. The three pillars of ESCO

Once ESCO is finalised, application can use its three-pillar structure. The three pillars of ESCO will cover i) occupations; ii) skills/competences; and iii) qualifications. Each pillar will have its own structure as shown in diagram 1.
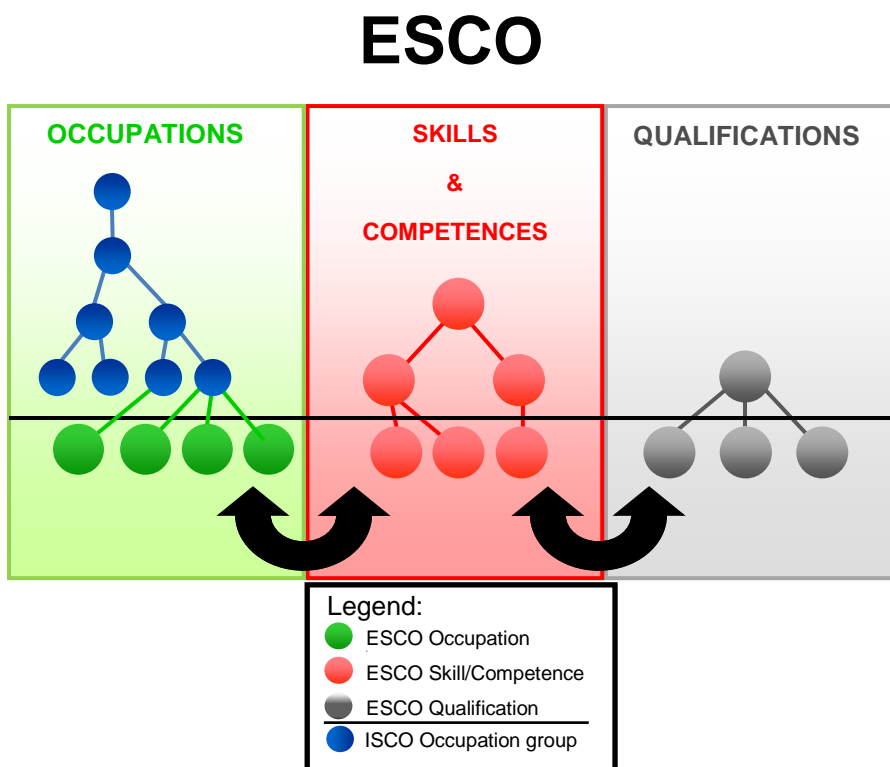
Diagram 1: ESCO: the three pillar approach

The **occupations pillar** currently contains around 5 000 occupations. It organises them by using ISCO[1] as a hierarchical structure.

The **skills/competences pillar** currently consists of around 5 200 job-specific skills/competences. Apart from job specific skills/competences (such as *accounting*, *machine tool setting* or *PHP programming*) it will also contain transversal skills/competences (such as the *ability to learn*, *numeracy* or *communication skills*) in future. A tailor-made and relevant structure for grouping skills/competences is currently being developed.

The **qualifications pillar** of ESCO is still under development and does not yet exist. The following types and categories of qualifications will be included into the ESCO qualifications pillar:

- National qualifications;
- Qualifications awarded at national level but regulated at European level;
- (International) qualifications, certificates and licences linked to tasks, technologies;
- (International) qualifications and certificates linked to occupations and sectors.

National, official qualifications need to be considered with particular care as ESCO will need to build on the work already carried out by the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the related national qualifications frameworks.

ESCO will be linked to national, regional and sectoral classifications as well as relevant international classifications and standards, such as NACE[2], ISCED[3] and the EQF.

4. Developing ESCO

ESCO is a long-term project that can only be achieved gradually and that requires a pragmatic, step-by-step approach. All interested parties are encouraged to actively contribute throughout the development and continuous revision of ESCO.

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[1] ISCO: International Standard Classification of Occupations; designed and managed by the International Labour Organization, ILO.

[2] NACE: Statistical Classification of Economic Activities in the European Community.

[3] ISCED: International Standard Classification of Education; designed and managed by UNESCO.

The current version of ESCO (pre-ESCO v0) has not yet been published. It contains approximately 5 000 occupations, 5200 skills/competences and 860 qualifications in 22 languages. It will be made available to selected stakeholders for testing purposes.

The first publicly released version of ESCO (ESCO v0) is expected in winter 2012/13. A revised version, which has been completely reviewed by stakeholders in all sectors, will be published as ESCO v1 and could be finalised by 2017. However, intermediary results will be made available before. The Reference Groups play a crucial role in the first review of ESCO's content.