

The new Learning and Development Framework for the European Statistical System (ESS-LDF) and International Exchange Programmes

A. BACKGROUND

Until 2004 the European Statistical System (ESS) had a statistical training programme addressed to statisticians at European National Statistical Institutes, national Competent Authorities, Eurostat, other countries and international organisations working with Eurostat. The coordination and implementation of this programme was entrusted to an external service provider contracted by the Commission. Participants had to pay fees.

After the Commission decision in 2003 to terminate contractual relations with this provider, an (interim) strategy based on a dual approach was chosen. A number of European Statistical Training Programme (ESTP) courses were organised by Eurostat, while others were offered by Member States of the European Statistical System (ESS) at their national training sites in 2004 and 2005 and co-financed by Eurostat.

The Working Group "Human Resource Management (HRM)", established in 2005, received through its mandate a strong involvement in the preparation and implementation of the ESTP. The group, mainly composed by HR heads of national statistical administrations and of Eurostat, favoured the creation of a network of national training managers (ESTP network). The members of this network were contact persons in technical or horizontal departments of national statistical institutes being in charge of training and career development. In close collaboration with Eurostat the network members aim at ensuring the necessary exchange of information to conceive, promote and efficiently support all ESTP related activities within the ESS.

During the ESTP implementation phase in 2004 the time schedule and limited internal resources in terms of staff and equipment only allowed for the organisation of four in-house courses and for the preparatory work related to the award of grants to Member States interested in offering courses. At the same time discussions with the EFTA secretariat led to an agreement that also EFTA would contribute to the ESTP with additional courses. From 2005 onwards the number of internal and external courses has increased steadily. The 2008 ESTP core programme comprises a total of 28 training courses, which corresponds to the number of courses offered through the former external provider TES in 2003.

Between 2004 and mid- 2008, more than 1600 statisticians from 31 countries applied for ESTP training courses. Out of 81 courses in total, 30 were organised by Eurostat at its own premises.

The approach initially chosen for the internalisation of the ESTP meant that an interim solution was able to be implemented as quickly as possible, while elaborating, on a medium term perspective, a revision in view of developing a sustainable long term strategy for statistical training in the ESS. The internalisation concentrated on establishing an appropriate offer of classroom type training courses for European Statisticians.

Eurostat's Training section was assigned to elaborate in parallel this new strategy that would go beyond the traditional classroom type training and also encompass other learning and development opportunities for European statisticians. This work could only be done in close cooperation with the members of the ESS.

With the aim of launching the discussion about the necessary future developments of the ESTP, Unit A6 started in autumn 2006 an ex-ante evaluation on the ESTP long term strategy, in which the main stakeholders were involved. To this end the Working Group ESTP/HRM decided to create a new Task Force on ESTP. The interest to participate in this Task Force was very high so that finally representatives from 11 Member States, EFTA and Eurostat are actively involved.

The objective of the Task Force was to discuss relevant issues concerning the content, scope and organisation of the ESTP programme and its future development. It was also agreed that the Task Force would regularly inform the Working Group ESTP/HRM on work progress and validate the major steps with the WG members.

Based on the draft ex-ante evaluation, the first meeting of the newly created Task Force dealt in particular with the question of defining the scope and content of the future ESTP. The group agreed on the appropriateness of broadening the scope of activities beyond traditional classroom training courses by moving towards a "ESS Learning and Development Framework (ESS LDF)". Using Eurostat Project Management Methodology, a detailed needs and risk analysis for all stakeholders was carried out. Since April 2007 the Task Force met four times and elaborated a proposal for the content of the future Framework.

The new ESS Learning and Development Framework is an ambitious programme with a long-term perspective. The aim is to widen statistical training in the ESS, not to limit it to traditional classroom teaching, rather extend it towards more active learning and development opportunities. The ESS-LDF is still in a draft form and will be discussed with the Member States during the next Working Group that will take place in Luxembourg on 6-7 October 2008.

The new framework, to be implemented from 2011 onwards, should complement and build on national training programmes. The value added of this framework is that it goes beyond traditional training and encompasses other forms of learning and development. A major element of the framework, compared to the national programme, is its European perspective. Training, or in some cases, learning and development programmes, exist at national level for all NSIs. The aim of the new framework will be to complement and build upon these programmes.

The contents of the new system are based on the needs of all important stakeholders and should refer to the demand of the NSIs and Eurostat but also have the flexibility to react to new emerging standards, techniques and methods.

The future content of the ESS LDF takes the perspective of a framework that allows flexibility for a stepwise implementation of the different modules/projects. Next to the training courses already recognised as an indispensable element of the programme, work will also focus on the identification of competence profiles of European Statisticians, of new tools and instruments (such as a pool of trainers, a Portal for Learning and Development, new learning methods, etc). Also an exchange of good practises to enhance learning and development are envisaged. Finally the future framework should also offer the possibility to measure the impact to the workplace and the return on investment. Also the development of teaching aids and model manuals could offer additional possibilities for a more targeted learning and development. Considering the effects and mutual links of the mentioned aspects

the strengthening of the European Statistical Capacity Building inside the ESS and outside the ESS will benefit automatically from all these projects.

B. OBJECTIVES TO BE ACHIEVED

The high level aim of the new framework is as follows:

The European Statistical System Learning and Development Framework (ESS-LDF) aims to foster the competence of the human capital in the ESS in order to raise the overall quality of European statistical information according to the principles stated in the European Code of Practice.

The new framework should help achieve the objectives of the ESS as defined in the 5-year statistical programme and the annual statistical programme of Eurostat.

The framework consists of different projects, the financing of which has not yet been decided and is not guaranteed. The projects are presented in terms of priority, which is indicative and can be changed when needs and opportunities arise. The current priority list recommends which projects are to be considered first and states the implications for those remaining.

In this context, the projects can be viewed as separate entities – albeit in some cases interdependent - and their organisation and financing should also reflect this view of the projects as distinct entities. This means that there is no one set way to organise and finance the whole framework - instead this will change according to the objectives of each project. Additionally, there might be more than one way of financing a project and the final decision should be based on a cost benefit analysis of the different options.

Content of training activities

1. Organisation of training courses in the Member States, EFTA countries and Eurostat

The organisation of classroom-type training courses will remain the core element of the new programme starting 2011. The programme of training courses should be one part of career-long learning and has to be complemented by other learning activities going beyond traditional training. The course programme could also include management and cross-sectional topics (such as management, communication issues, database management, statistical processes, etc.).

2. Identification of competence profile(s) for European Statisticians

The specification of core technical/non-technical competences for European statisticians will be an essential element. This will provide the necessary information to revamp the programme and target it more to the real needs and competences required for a European Statistician. However, the profile(s) should complement the national one(s) by adding a European dimension, covering different types and levels. The work started with an inventory of profiles already existing on national level.

New tools and instruments

3. Set up a pool of trainers and agree on the modalities for their exchange

The success of a future ESS-LDF will depend on the quality of its trainers. The first step would be to identify possible trainers and create and maintain a database of approved trainers. This database would only be used for the purposes of the ESS-LDF (taking into account data protection issues) and it could include private experts. Potential trainers who are staff

members of national statistical offices can only be approached for conducting courses through their respective national ESS-LDF Contact Points¹.

4. Portal for Learning and Development in the European Statistical System

This is a transversal tool that will support all other objectives of the programme. It will be the main communication portal within the ESS, to be used for e-learning, sharing good practices, disseminating teaching aids, manuals and glossaries, course materials, etc.

5. Implementation of learning methods/methodologies complementary to training

5.1. E-learning is a tool that would enrich a programme such as the ESS-LDF by going beyond geographic and language constraints. It takes advantage of the ability of the technology to move effortlessly across countries and it makes it widely available to many more participants. After a general inventory of e-learning applications available in the Member States, EFTA and international organisations, e-learning applications will have to be developed and tailored to the special needs of the ESS-LDF.

5.2 A scheme for short term **study visits** (maximum duration of two weeks) with clear objectives both at national level and at Eurostat level should be developed. The exchange of staff among Member States, Eurostat and International organisations has a strong link with learning and development opportunities. The ESTP/HRM Working Group will discuss new proposals for the organisation of short term study visits in Eurostat at its next meeting in October 2008,.

5.3 A **summer school** (annual) for official statisticians working in the ESS should be organised in cooperation with a host university.

6. Exchange of good practice to enhance learning and development

Sharing good practice is one of the most efficient ways of promoting learning and development in the workplace. The work should start by identifying such good practice at national and international level in the field of learning and development and creating a vehicle for sharing this good practice (such as a database, a discussion forum, cooperation with universities, etc.). For the implementation of this project it is recommended to organise one symposium, conference or workshop every year, concentrating on a topic of relevance. These topics could range from the area of learning and development such as coaching/mentoring, on the job training and also from the area of statistics such as seasonal adjustment, national accounts, etc.

7. Measurement on the impact to the workplace and return on investment

The benefits gained by implementing any training inputs from the new ESS-LDF, especially in the NSIs and Eurostat, should be subject to an evaluation in order to make continuous improvements in the contents and teaching methods based on lessons learned. A tool should be developed to measure the return on investment of the organisation and the individual by measuring the impact of learning back in the work place. For example, this means that participants in ESS-LDF activities would be expected to function as multipliers transmitting the knowledge they have gained to their colleagues at their respective institutions.

8. Development of teaching aids and model manuals

Teaching aids and model manuals for official statistics with emphasis on European concepts and definitions have to be developed. New methods and methodologies should be used as

¹ Contact points/persons were officially nominated by the General Directors and empowered to carry out specific tasks and functions related to the ESTP activities.

much as possible. Common training material for some standard courses could be envisaged as well as the compilation of a multi-language glossary of statistical terms.

Other issues

9. Statistical Capacity Building inside the ESS and outside the ESS

The aim of the ESS-LDF is to foster the competence of human capital in the ESS in order to raise the quality of European statistical information. It was recognised that there could also be an element of statistical capacity building not only within the ESS but, in a second phase, also encompassing countries outside the ESS.

10. Other issues to be addressed in the future

A project of lesser importance, but nonetheless necessary to address, is the one dealing with analysis of the major bottlenecks that ESS countries face in their training and development programmes, as well as in their educational programmes relating to statistics. Another peripheral activity is the statistical training of external stakeholders of official statistics. As the possible target groups here can be considerably large, it is recommended that the ESS-LDF identifies pilots that are taking place in the ESS, monitors their success and subsequently, takes any appropriate measures to address this issue.

C. INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE PROGRAMMES AS ONE OF THE ELEMENTS OF THE ESS-LDF

Eurostat has always been committed to the exchange of staff with the Member States and international organisations as a means of providing first hand and complementary experience of the policies and working methods at international, European or national level. This has been recognised as a learning and development opportunity and has been included in the ESS-LDF.

Such staff mobility develops and reinforces cooperation through exchange of information and networking, transfer of expertise and in-depth knowledge of the statistical issues and problems facing Eurostat, the national or international authority, as the case may be.

Furthermore, the exchanges offer excellent value in terms of career development for the staff numbers concerned. The link between exchanges of staff, study visits and career long-term learning has been recognised and discussed in the ESS-LDF and study visits are part of it. Finally, exchanges of staff are an excellent way of building a partnership.

Currently more than seventy national officials are seconded to Eurostat under the Seconded National Experts' regime. A further twenty or so persons are trained in Eurostat under the PHARE or CARDS programmes. Secondments of national officials to Eurostat are at a high level; secondments of Eurostat staff to national and international organisations have been limited.

Eurostat, within the context of the ESS-LDF is discussing internally and with the Member States the possibility of setting up study visits. Preliminary discussions with the Member States showed considerable support for short visits.

Currently there are three types of such visits:

- i Short and sharp study visits of 2-3 days, focussing on specific topics that have been agreed upon in advance. These visits would be more appropriate for senior experts and for a small number of countries involved.

- ii The most practised form of study visits, usually in the Member States, takes place under the cooperation agreements and focuses on specific domains. This is more appropriate for visits from NSIs outside the ESS.
- iii Organisations of a study visit, targeting junior staff, in order to learn about the hosting organisations, create networks and exchange of experiences.

The current discussion concentrates on the third type which is the organisation of a "European statistical" week in Luxembourg with a fixed 1-2 day programme part of general European topics and an introduction to Eurostat followed by visits to the relevant Units within Eurostat. This could be organised once or twice per year and it is hoped that Member States could also organise similar events at a later stage. The group will have a maximum size of 25 people and should consist of people coming from different statistical areas. In the long run such visits could also be organised in the Member States by the NSIs. In such cases, Eurostat staff could also participate.