

**Workshop on Human Resources Management and  
Training in Statistical Offices  
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**Module 6: Organisation of training activities and tools/methods for training  
The Importance of International Networking in Statistical Training**

The experience from the Learning and Development Framework for the European Statistical System (ESS-LDF)

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## **1. Introduction**

The European Statistical Training Programme (ESTP) and the Learning and Development Framework (LDF) of the European Statistical System (ESS) have already been subject-matters of presentations in earlier CES meetings. While on these occasions the information mainly concentrated on the structure and content of European statistical training, the present document focuses on the forms of co-operation and networking between ESS stakeholders that allowed for their development and implementation. Using the ESS-LDF development as an example shows the importance of intense and broad networking for progress and success in statistical training.

In the following, "networking" is understood as going beyond establishing and maintaining contacts. It refers to the numerous forms and levels of communication, co-operation and sharing of experiences that gradually developed between stakeholders over the last 5 years. It has been a process of continuous and fruitful mutual learning between experts from inside and outside the ESS which has finally overcome initial difficulties and achieved progress in the corresponding projects.

## **2. Background**

Until 2004, the European Statistical System had a common statistical training programme aimed at statisticians within European national statistical institutes, Eurostat, and other countries and international organisations working with Eurostat. The coordination and realisation of the programme were outsourced to an external service provider. At ESS level, the responsibility for the programme and its implementation was the competence of "Statistical co-operation" and the corresponding groups and networks were composed of co-operation managers from Eurostat and National Statistical Institutes (NSI).

After the Commission decision in 2003 to terminate contractual relations for this programme, Eurostat's HR

unit was charged with the overall coordination of the programme. As an (interim) strategy a dual approach was chosen. A number of ESTP courses would be organised by Eurostat, while others were offered by member countries of the European Statistical System (ESS) at their national training sites. The latter were co-financed through grants to cover part of the costs. At the same time EFTA agreed to contribute to the ESTP annual programme by delivering 2-3 additional courses.

During the early implementation phase, limited time and resources only allowed for the organisation of four internal courses at Eurostat. As of 2005 the number of courses rose steadily, from eleven to eighteen in 2006 and twenty in 2007. The ESTP public procurement procedure launched in 2006 entailed another extension of the training programme which took effect in 2008 and raised the average number of courses to a sustainable level of 30 courses per year.

Looking back at the reasons for success in setting-up the new training programme and the Learning and Development Framework for the ESS, it becomes evident that the readiness and commitment of stakeholders to engage in international networking and co-operation have played a major role.

### **3. Broadening the networks**

#### **3.1 The HRM/ESTP Working Group**

The Working Group "Human Resource Management", established in 2005, received the mandate for the preparation and implementation of the new ESTP strategy. This group, mainly composed of 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 aimed at ensuring the necessary exchange of information to conceive, promote and efficiently support all ESTP related activities within the ESS.

In the beginning, the main concern of the Working Group was, however, to ensure the delivery of a certain number of courses in the coming years and to launch work on a sustainable long term solution for training in the ESS. Furthermore, the ESS training needs had to be assessed in view of future programmes. To this end, Eurostat consulted Member States and Eurostat units via a survey and at the same time invited them to co-operate in the delivery of the annual programme.

Through these activities, the contacts and exchanges within the network strengthened and multiplied over 2005-2006. This was in particular the case among NSIs that participated actively in the annual course programmes, either by organising ESTP courses themselves or by providing trainers for courses organised in Eurostat or other NSIs. To exchange views with the stakeholders and gather experience Eurostat staff visited courses in Member States.

As a consequence of the joint efforts and the resultant increase in the training offer, the ESTP soon enjoyed great popularity. Already in 2006 the number of applications for ESTP courses largely exceeded the number of available places. After a period of limited training at European level, the demand was high and requests for a broader offer were frequently expressed. The public procurement procedure allowed for another rise in the number of courses, but these developments also presented new challenges for the co-operation in the existing training networks.

In order to progress with the long term European training strategy and to meet the emerging challenges, the HRM/ESTP Working Group in 2007 took two important steps to ensure efficient co-operation, communication and sharing of experience in a broadened ESTP context:

- a) the creation of an **ESTP Task Force**  
to discuss relevant issues concerning the content, scope, the organisation of the ESTP and to develop a sustainable long term strategy
- b) the creation of a **network of official ESTP contact points** in NSIs and Eurostat  
to deal with all administrative aspects related to the ESTP

### **3.2 ESTP Task Force**

In accordance with the decision of the HRM/ESTP Working Group, Eurostat's Training unit launched in autumn 2006 an ex-ante evaluation on the ESTP long term strategy. In order to involve the main stakeholders in carrying out the study, a Task Force was created and countries invited to express their interest in participating. The current group is composed of representatives from 11 Member States, Eurostat and EFTA. Their original mandate was to discuss relevant issues concerning the content, scope, the organisation of the ESTP programme and to work on a proposal for a sustainable long term strategy.

In January 2008, the ESTP Task Force prepared a proposal for the Member States which broadened the scope of future training programme by moving towards an "ESS Learning and Development Framework (ESS-LDF)".

Following their proposal, the mandate of the Task Force was redefined in 2009. The new framework, to be implemented from 2011 onwards, comprises projects that go beyond traditional class-room training and encompass other forms of learning and development. It complements and builds on national training programmes and focuses on a European perspective.

The first meeting of the Task Force members in spring 2007 can be considered as the launching of an animated and extremely fruitful period of co-operation. The success can be attributed to a number of factors:

#### **Composition of the group**

The group represents countries from new and old Member States. Members coming not only from HR departments, but also from co-operation departments, can contribute with the experience of both working fields.

### **Participatory approach**

From the beginning a participatory approach for the meetings was chosen. Through brainstorming sessions and net cafés as well as in more traditional working forms, all group members have been actively involved in the process of defining the aim and structure, the scope and objectives of the overall project. The ESS-LDF Framework is the outcome of the joint effort of all participants and it has often been referred to as an example of good co-operation.

### **Working in project groups**

The proposed ESS-LDF comprises a list of projects that, from 2010 onwards, is to be gradually implemented in line with an identified priority list.

For each of the projects listed below a project group has been set up. These consist of 3-4 countries/members with one of them acting as project leader. The project groups draft ex-ante studies, work on proposals for the implementation and report on their work to the TF and the WG.

The ESS-LDF Task Force decided in April 2009 to continue or to start with the following projects:

- a) Elaboration of competence profile(s) for European Statisticians
- b) Measurement on the impact of learning
- c) Identification and development of appropriate E-learning instruments
- d) Implementation of an Internet Portal for Learning and Development
- e) Organization of study visits
- f) Exchange of practice

### **Sharing of experience and commitment of the group**

The ESS-LDF project as a whole and the work in the sub-groups have very much benefitted from the commitment and input of the TF members, some of them being experts in the respective area. The sharing of experience within the individual project groups and the commitment of their members to contribute to the studies can be considered as the driving force of progress.

### **Link to high-level decision making groups**

From the outset the Task Force has enjoyed the full empowerment and support for its work from the HRM/ESTP Working Group (since 2009 called ESS-LDF/HRM WG). During the annual Working Group meetings, the work of the Task Force is presented and adopted. Apart from regular briefings to the WG, the Task Force regularly reported to high-level management groups that were in direct relation with the Directors General of the ESS. This link to decision makers ensured not only awareness of and compliance with policy developments, but also transparency and management support.

Since 2007, the Task Force (as of 2009 called ESS-LDF TF) has met eight times and has taken the responsibility to elaborate concepts and recommendations for the decision-making bodies.

## **3.3 Network of ESTP contact points**

The delivery of some 50 ESTP courses during the first four years led to a wealth of experiences in the organisation and administration of courses inside Eurostat and in co-operation with NSIs. The frequent contacts with the NSI departments responsible for training had, in general, been very positive and fruitful. However, with the increase in the number of courses and the boom of applications, it became evident that a number of processes needed to be reviewed with regard to possible improvements. Administrative procedures (e.g. in the processing of applications, the selection of candidates, etc.) needed to be streamlined and simplified. Roles and functions of the different stakeholders had to be clarified and contact persons in NSI officially to be empowered to carry them out. Furthermore new stakeholders (contractors, non-ESS stakeholders, etc.) needed to be integrated.

In autumn 2007, the HRM/ESTP WG therefore agreed to set up a network of ESTP contact points. By the end of the year, contact persons were officially nominated by the NSIs and empowered to carry out specific tasks and functions related to the ESTP activities. In 2008 the members of the new network of national ESTP contact points (NCP) took up their duties.

Today a total of 38 contact points exist in the ESS, 33 of which are located in NSIs, one in Eurostat and one in the EFTA Statistical Office in Luxembourg. Three additional ones are set up in the offices of the contractors organising courses on behalf of Eurostat.

The roles and responsibilities of the contact points in ESS countries are identical, while a couple of differences exist for Eurostat and the contact points of the course organisers.

**National contact points (NCP)** are responsible for the dissemination of all ESTP related information at national level (i.e. core programme, news from Eurostat and other stakeholders, reminders, etc.). They are contact points not only for their own administrations (NSI), but also for potential external users who, being producers of Official statistics, form part of the ESS and are entitled to benefit from the programme.

The services provided by the national contact points comprise in particular:

- Information concerning the framework, the objectives and the contents of the ESTP;
- Help desk functions for internal and external users;
- Collection and coordination of applications (with internal and external departments);
- Coordination, evaluation and ranking of applications in cases where a pre-selection is necessary (e.g. for courses with limited places or special conditions);
- Transmission of applications to course organisers (Eurostat or the organisers);
- Exchange of views and consultation with Eurostat and other course organisers in case of queries.

Figure 1 shows the role of an NCP in the coordination of national applications for an ESTP course organised in an ESS country.

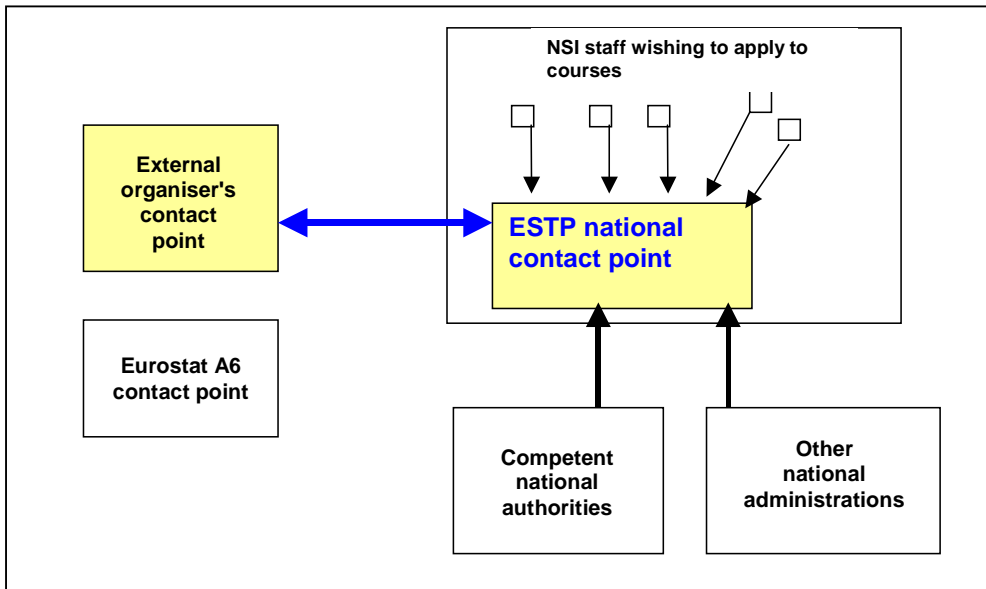
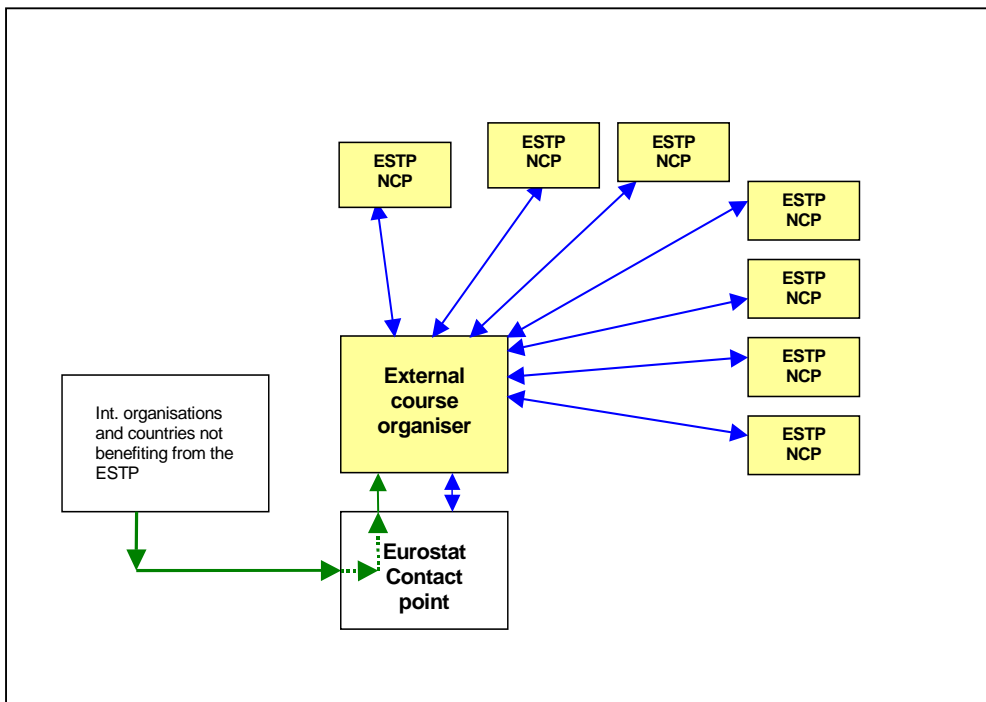


Figure 2 shows the coordination of applications from Non-ESS candidates via Eurostat



The introduction of the NCP considerably reduced the administrative burden, facilitated the co-operation, and increased transparency. Eurostat regularly provides ESTP contact points with an updated "Information kit" which describes the main procedures and provides an updated list of contact details.

#### **4. The ESS networking tool "INSite"**

"INSite", the ESS information exchange platform, has become an important communication tool for the ESTP contact points and all ESS-Learning and development networks.

The ESTP homepage, located under Eurostat's "Staff matter" directory, is regularly updated with new or additional information. The current website provides downloadable versions of the annual core programme, the latest application form and a FAQ section. Approximately six to eight weeks before each course, a reminder message is published on the INSIte homepage with a link to the ESTP website. Since July 2008, some additional information on interesting training events (international seminars, conferences, etc.) has been made available.

New sections presenting the outcome of the ESS-LDF projects like the 'Competence Profiles for European Statisticians' have been added, and countries are invited to share their national experiences by uploading documentation on their country homepages.

#### **5. Conclusion**

International networking is an indispensable element for development in statistical training and beyond. The experience from the ESS-LDF demonstrates how the sharing of information and experience through formal and informal networks not only promotes knowledge and know-how, but also the values set down in the European Code of Practice. It is therefore not surprising that the ESS Learning and Development Framework itself includes "Sharing of good practice" as one of the areas of future investment. Whatever type of learning will be favoured in upcoming developments, whether classroom training, e-learning or any other form, the human factor of networking will remain a key to success and cannot become redundant.