



Editorial

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Dear colleagues,
The Skills Councils, as you are well aware, were devised to anticipate the evolutions of vocational qualifications and reduce the skills gap, improving the match between skills and professional profiles in specific sectors.

Our Skills Council, launched on 5th December 2012 and dedicated to the Commerce sector, is already working full steam on its programme for 2014 – and what an intense year it is!

The Social Partners, EuroCommerce and UNI Europa, are putting in their best efforts to exchange information on employment and skills within the Council, and beyond to complementary initiatives, as well as to collect and update sectorial knowledge, most of which will converge in four targeted reports. Raising awareness and increasing the involvement of key stakeholders across the board is also a core ob-

jective - on the issues, our activities and the results achieved.

None of this would be possible without the committed involvement of participating Industry Skills Partnerships from a range of European Countries, and their knowledge of the issues on the ground, and of the European Commission, whose interest and funding are essential to support our work. We are very grateful to them.

A glimpse of what we are doing and who is involved to get there are presented in the few pages you are reading, and many additional questions can be answered by visiting our web portal or, more simply, by asking us - so get in touch!

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Moving ahead in 2014: What we are setting out to do

The European Sector Skills Council for Commerce has established an ambitious, but focused set of objectives and activities for its first year of functioning. Activities are based on four pillars, aiming at exchanging information, collecting and updating sectorial knowledge, interacting with the market and pursuing intense communication.

Research and analysis are currently being carried out after careful planning, and their successful completion will absorb much of the effort of the Council this year. Communication and dissemination activities, with the use of traditional and web-based tools are also being undertaken: these include the enhancement and further redeployment of the ESC's Web Portal, the production of leaflets and newsletters, and the organisation of events and seminars.

A large conference is foreseen to conclude the year's activi-

ties: it will provide a valuable opportunity to showcase the results achieved during the year, further raise awareness on the issues addressed, present the content of the reports produced and put forward the recommendations to key sector's stakeholders, such as other observatories, industrial associations, trade unions, public authorities at national and local level, training and vocational centers, secondary level schools and technical universities, and sectoral magazines and specialized web sites.

One of the main objectives is to produce consistent, structured and reliable sectorial intelligence in the field of Employment and Training, which could be of use also by other EU initiatives in the field. For this purpose, Harmonisation Meetings have been conducted, culminating in a Seminar with ESCO, Skills Panorama and Skills Alliance. More on this

event and its outcomes can be found in the dedicated article below.

This sectorial intelligence will be enshrined and made available to the public through the Council's Web Portal, which is also a key instrument to raise and maintain the involvement of sectorial stakeholders and disseminate activities' results. The other core tools enabling collection, analysis and diffusion of Commerce-related information are the three reports currently being drafted as follows:

Report Nr. 1 aims at evaluating the current employment situation of the Commerce sector, including forecasts and trends, detailing sub-sector and country information, and privileging the collection of data.

Report Nr. 2 is dedicated to the evolution of sector's occupation and associated skills and aims at a more qualitative assessment of the evolution of the sector, drawing on available information from national sector skills councils.

Report Nr. 3, finally, describes innovative tools, national and regional strategies, initiatives and methods to monitor skills needs and address skill mismatch and gaps. It puts to their

best use the wealth of knowledge and experience of participating Council Members, making reference to successful national actions.

A fourth report is foreseen, which will be regrouping the recommendations of the European sector skills council based on the information collected and the analysis done as part of the reports and as a result of discussions between council members. This will be drafted in an *ad hoc* session after the final Conference, and then distributed on the Web Portal.

Regular meetings allow Council Member to network, exchange information, coordinate common work and take the necessary decisions to achieve the Council objectives. Two have been foreseen for this year - and a summary on the outcomes of the first one can be found in this issue.



Boosting interaction: Harmonisation Seminar outcomes

A core objective of the European Skills Councils is an increased cooperation with other European Commission initiatives.

For this purpose, a Harmonisation Seminar has been held on 17th March 2014, hosted on UniEuropa premises. In attendance, several officers of the Commission and representatives of the existing Skills Councils, ESCO, Skills Panorama and Skills Alliance - other initiatives related to employment and training. Through this successful meeting, the groundwork for cooperation and sharing of resources was put forward.

In the meeting, the complementarity between the Skills Councils and the aforementioned initiatives has been acknowledged by all parties, including Commission services, along with the need to work on a common denominator and understanding of their different, parallel activities. Skills Council are designed to be not only data collectors, but also technical bodies producing consistent information and intelligence on skills with the aim of increasing job opportunities and satisfying the demands for qualified workforce on the market.

In a harmonised framework, Skills Councils are called to act strategically, proactively as a sentinel, alerting on skills

needs, so that concrete answers to sectorial requirements can be provided, possibly with an increased involvement of VET providers. There was agreement on the sectorial dimension being a "good angle" for action.

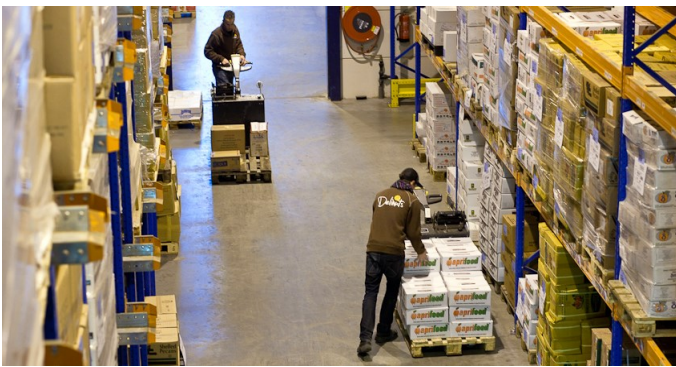


Finally, Skills Councils, as well as Skills Alliances, need resources to carry out their mission of skills anticipation and filling the skills mismatches: to carry out this vital activities, Social partners need the continuous support of the European Commission.

Council Meeting One: taking stock and going forward

As established in the Work Programme, the first ESC Commerce Meeting took place on 14th April 2014 on UNIEUROPA premises in Brussels. Members of the Board, IPSs representatives and the external experts joined the meeting. It was an intensive working session, during which several topics were presented and discussed and a detailed work plan was produced, with general agreement on the calendar activities.

After a brief presentation of the attendees and their respective organisations, aimed at clarifying the competencies of each Member of the Council, the meeting entered in the crucial phase of the discussion.



Following the debriefing on the successful Harmonisation Seminar, presented on p. 2, the largest portion of the Meeting was dedicated to defining exact requirements and contents for the analysis and reports.

The reports will define a specific framework containing substantial input/information from the ISPs and taking into consideration the indication of the Commission. This framework would be detailed in Report Nr. 1. With regards to Report Nr. 2, Council Members welcomed the idea of analysing the impact of a selection of drivers of Skills demand (seven have been identified) on a number of occupations representative of the commerce sector. Report Nr. 3 will be a collection of best practices in the field of employment and training in the commerce sector – a ‘best practice’ being defined as a method / action consistently showing superior results and representing a potential benchmark .

The final topic on the agenda addressed the possibility of expanding the Skills Council through the involvement of ISPs from different European countries, and an update on this activity was agreed for the first Technical Meeting on 27th June.

An interview with...

Rob van Wezel
Manager KCH International



Q: Can you briefly introduce KCH?

■ Kenniscentrum Handel (KCH) is the Dutch Centre of Expertise on vocational education, training and the labour market for the trade sector.

KCH consists of four divisions, the largest of which is performing a number of statutory tasks for the Dutch intermediate vocational education system. KCH performs these tasks for the trade sector and for manufacturers, suppliers and traders in the Fashion, Interior, Carpets and Textile industry (known as the MITT sector), contributing to a vocational education infrastructure that facilitates and stimulates professional development.

KCH delivers products and services to companies, sector organizations, training institutions, government bodies and individual professionals, fostering the definition, assessment, planning and monitoring of professional development.

Q: How has the involvement in the ESC Commerce benefited your Organisation?

■ KCH requires a good understanding of relevant trends and must have access to up-to-date statistics in order to draw up

qualifications for professions in its sectors of competence and for the focused recruitment of training companies. On the other hand, companies, sector organisations, educational institutions and government bodies also require information about sectoral trends in relation to employment market issues and personnel policy.

Kenniscentrum Handel researches these developments, as well as the relations between labour market developments and market training needs, disseminating the most recent qualitative and quantitative information about the trade sector and relevant training programmes, directly to stakeholders and online.

Q: Which, amongst the many successful initiatives run by KCH, you feel would be beneficial to workers and companies in other EU countries?

■ I could name some initiatives, but I would rather take a closer look at KCH’s vision and how it is translated into actions. Optimally utilising and developing human capital within a company contributes towards profitability and business

continuity; while employees benefit from personal development and better career perspectives. For each organization, it is worth reflecting on expectations from employees, and on effective actions to boost their performance. What competences does the organisation need? Which are already present? Does the company enable employees to continue to develop? How do you encourage people's development?

What specific competences a company requires, depends on the nature of the business; and what choices it makes are also determined by its view on performance. However, specific choices are not the real issue: the issue is for companies to choose and act in a conscious manner.

Q: What advice would you give to workers pursuing a career in Commerce? In your opinion, what skills tend to be the most sought after in this highly competitive sector?

■ We have learned, also from discussions in the Reference Group ESCO Retail and Wholesale we are members of, that the focus for workers should not be only on technical skills and knowledge. Increasingly, the labour market requests for transversal skills - such as languages and creativity, but also



entrepreneurial competences.

To this end, KCH has developed the Entrepreneurship Module eligible for Certification (CEM). It is based on 7 processes, the first three of them tackling the drafting of a business plan and starting up a business, while the rest mainly with maintaining and developing the business once it has started. CEM has adopted seven competencies that build on attributes such as individual responsibility, innovative abilities, effective work, social skills and commercial mindset.

Q: The ESC Commerce has an intense Work Programme for 2014. As a Member, what goals are you most committed to achieve?

■ Two essential reports on Human Capital Management were published by KCH in early 2014, focussing on the practical implementation of HCM (How Does It Work?) and on the vision and soul (Vision and Soul Determine the Possibilities, Focus and Ambition the Results). From this perspective, we felt that the completion of Reports Nr. 2 and 3 (cf. *Moving ahead in 2014* on pp. 1 and 2 of this issue) are very useful for our organisation.

Surfing the Net – Links & Resources

European Sector Skills Councils

The Web Portal of the initiative by European Commission (DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion) aiming at anticipating the need for skills in specific sectors more effectively and achieving a better match between skills and labour market needs.

> ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=784

Sector Skills Alliances

A Commission initiative designed to promote European cooperation within specific sectors of the economy. SSAs develop vocational skills from the perspective of labour market needs, ensuring cooperation between education and employment.

> ec.europa.eu/education/events/2014/20140415-sector-skills_en.htm

Funding on education and training

A gateway to all the opportunities and funding to improve Vocational Education and Training across Europe.

> ec.europa.eu/education/funding-search_en.htm

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This Newsletter has been produced with the financial support of the European Commission.



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