



Blueprint in the Spotlight 25 November 2019

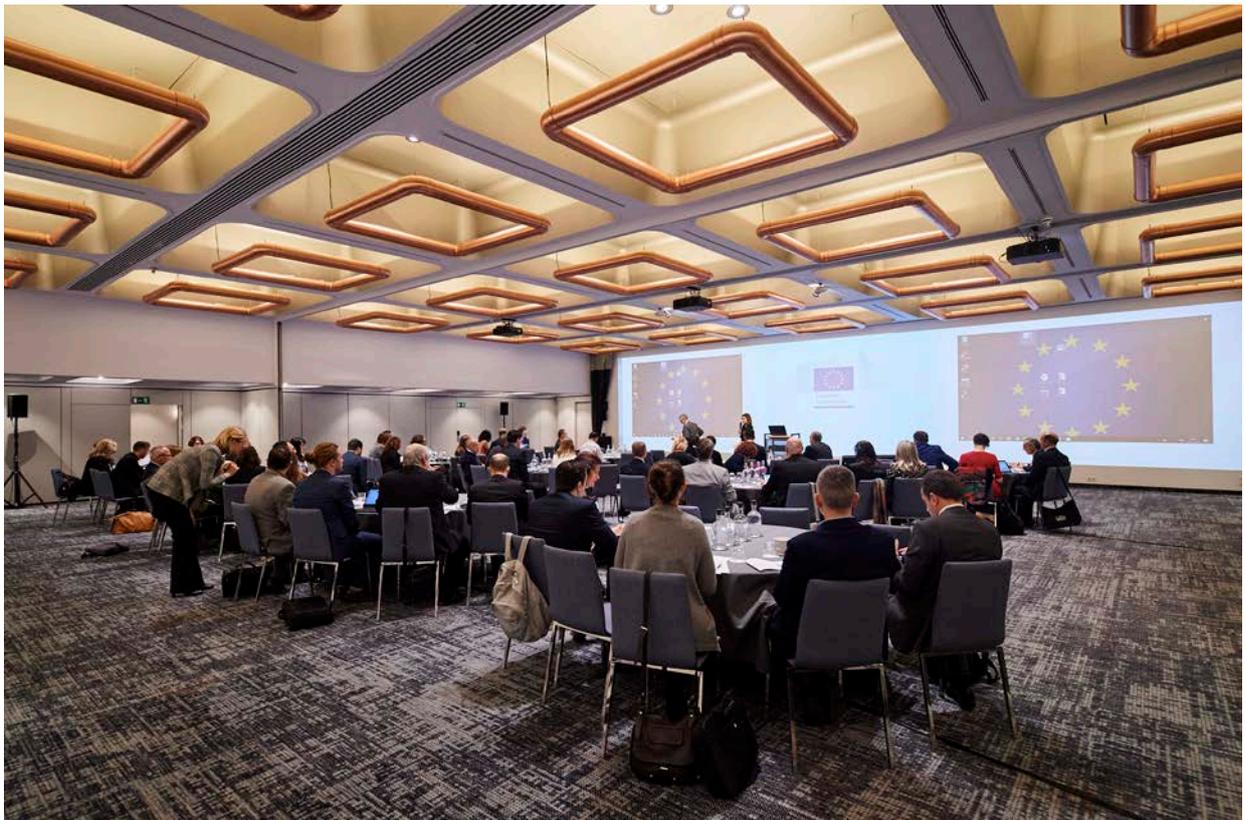
Seminar Report

This seminar, organised by DG EMPL in close cooperation with DGs GROW, MARE, REGIO and RTD as well as the EACEA, follows the first Blueprint seminar in 2018.

The Wave I of the Blueprint projects, covering automotive, maritime technology, textile/clothing/leather/footwear, tourism and space geo-information sectors, have reached the midpoint in their 4-year project cycle. The Wave II, covering additive manufacturing, construction, maritime shipping and steel industry, have reached their one-year mark. The Wave III, covering bioeconomy, new technologies and innovation in agriculture, batteries for electro-mobility, defence technologies, digitalisation of the energy value chain, industrial symbiosis in energy-intensive industries, and microelectronic manufacturing & design, will soon be starting.

With this seminar, the nine on-going projects and the six recently selected Blueprint proposals had the chance to share knowledge and reflect on the challenges and breakthroughs so far, and to meet with stakeholders among and beyond the partnerships that will help to maximise the sustainability and impact of each Blueprint in years to come.

Eddy Adams moderated the seminar.



The day was designed around three broader themes: sectoral skills strategies and the regional dimension; occupational profiles and training; as well as sustainability of project results.

Seminar headlines

For the **regional roll-out** it is essential to develop strategies to approach smart specialisation strategy regions with matching sectors; thus Blueprint projects should be able to **demonstrate tangible benefits** for the relevant key stakeholders at regional level.

EQF and ESCO provide a common language and understanding of occupational profiles, qualifications and skills; while EQF provides a **starting point** to position new or reviewed qualifications in the national systems, ESCO is the starting point for the definition of occupational profiles. One single system is needed.

In order to ensure its sustainability a Blueprint Alliance furthermore needs to **develop a business model** in which it is not just a “skills provider” but a **broker for other sectoral and regional stakeholders**, also advising on funding sources.

Manuela Geleng (Director, Skills, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion) opened the seminar.

Ms Geleng recalled the messages of the previous seminar that it is essential to harness the strong interest of external stakeholders **early on**, that trickling down of the project results to regional & national level is important, that strengthening the dialogue between VET and industry were crucial, and that the EU tools (ESCO, Europass, EQF) need to be put to best use in each sectoral skills strategy.

She informed that President von der Leyen in her letter to Nicolas Schmit, charges him with “work on implementing and **updating our skills**

agenda, focusing on identifying and filling skills shortages and supporting reskilling as part of the just transition, and that “he should explore the idea of individual learning accounts for people of working age”.



The update of the Skills Agenda would be coordinated with the new Industrial Strategy.

Furthermore, Ms Geleng underlined that progress will depend on **strong and agile partnerships** of stakeholders, able to bridge between the needs of the labour market and education and training systems, and that with the Blueprint projects, we already have a promising model.

Plenary 1: Implementing sectoral skills strategies at regional level

In the first plenary session, two presentations were held.

Laurent de Mercey of the DG Regional Policy talked about the regional dimension for skills development.

He anticipated a strong adaptation need of labour markets at regional level to automation and robotisation. Automation and robotisation will create new opportunities for workers,

requiring new and more advanced skills.



Short-time adaptations of skills at regional level are strongly determined by regional smart specialisation strategies (RS3). The promotion of entrepreneurship and manufacturing business cases are two additional elements of the four building blocks of RS3. The next smart specialisation strategies and ERDF will support innovation management in SMEs. The ERDF will support skills (training/upskilling) within firms, skills for HE and research to increase commercial viability. He highlighted the importance of the integration of education and training (E&T) in technology diffusion ecosystems. The plenary then discussed the need for establishing a regional cooperation culture through change agents. Nevertheless, it needs the regions to initiate the involvement of VET institutions in smart specialisation strategies.



Then Fritz Walter, the coordinator of the Blueprint Alliance for textile/clothing/leather/footwear (TCLF), brought concrete project experience with the regional dimension to the audience. One of the main questions is “how to make it work all across Europe”, i.e. how to mobilise regional stakeholders to launch effective upskilling.



The Alliance was in the favourable position to build on a previous regional initiative, “RegioTex”, which in turn implemented smart specialisation in the TCLF sectors, including the necessary upskilling. Building cross-regional cooperation alongside R&D stakeholders takes time (4 years in this particular example). Mr Walter recommended reviewing VET activities and outcomes in regions involved in 2014-2020 RS3, and to provide input to the 2021-2027 S3 programming based on results and lessons learned from the Blueprint Alliances.

Workshop 1: Putting sectoral skills strategies into action – the regional dimension

In the first workshop, participants discussed in seven parallel groups. The guiding questions were the following:

- What are the key elements for a successful Blueprint skills strategy?
- How to roll-out EU-level strategy at regional level?

To develop a solid skills strategy, the projects had to find a means to describe the future. All Blueprint projects examined developments either by country or by subsector, which they referred to as scenarios or megatrends. In order to develop dynamic strategies and to regularly review and revise them, it is crucial to engage sector stakeholders as well as peers. All projects articulated their difficulty of involving stakeholders and receiving feedback from them.

To pinpoint regions to prioritise for regional implementation, project partners are encouraged to identify specific regions in their countries which are specialised in their own respective sectors or which have shown interest in the project. Furthermore, regions in EU Cluster Partnerships or regions with smart specialisation strategies in the Blueprint sectors will potentially see synergies with Blueprint project results. ERA-NET¹ calls for skills development could be an approach that bridges the European views and the implementation on regional level.

In case of the absence of regional strategies that match with the Blueprint skills strategies, resort on willing frontrunners: industry can pull! You roll out where demand side is the strongest.

¹ ERA-NET under Horizon 2020 is a funding instrument designed to support public-public partnerships in their preparation, establishment of networking structures, design and implementation, and coordination of joint activities. The instruments mainly 'tops-up' funding for single joint calls and transnational actions.



The key actors to be involved in regional implementation depend on the regional administrative structure in the relevant country. Key actors to be involved in the roll-out process are the following:

- regional governments
- authorities for training and education
- regional development agencies
- social partners
- education & training providers
- support structures for funding (ESF, national, industry/sector funding)
- chambers of commerce, industry or labour
- industry (umbrella) organisations

Since it is widely believed that European projects only focus on European level issues, in order to engage people and businesses at regional level Blueprint projects must be able to demonstrate tangible benefits for these target groups.

Blueprint projects should formulate a strategy to approach regions with sectors matching multiple projects jointly.

If a region specialises in several sectors that match with several blueprint projects, these projects should team up and approach the region together.

Plenary 2: Delivering training for new occupational profiles

In the second plenary, **Koen Nomden** from DG EMPL explained the relevance of the EQF/NQF and ESCO for the development of training content because they are based on the principle of learning outcomes.



He highlighted the need for flexibility and adaptation of learning outcomes to local conditions. That will also enable teachers and trainers to apply the right methods. This relates also to the regional dimension elaborated in the previous session. Importantly, learning outcomes need to be fit for purpose, i.e. to distinguish between intended and actual learning outcomes.

Adelaide Almeida, speaking for the Blueprint in additive manufacturing (SAM), stressed the importance of international qualifications for harmonising sectoral/technical contents; the EQF was an inspiration for the establishment of a sectoral Qualification Framework and an additive manufacturing (AM) modular training system - with 6 qualifications for metal AM (engineering and operator level). The project has already informed ESCO on the new profiles in additive manufacturing.

Tackling skills and qualifications in AM takes place within a 'pentagon': fast evolving technology, industrial requirements, different skills levels, VET and higher education and national education & training systems.



For the regional rollout, the project has the objective to have the AM competence units/modules be recognised at national level. In order to be able to identify skills needs in AM until 2030 the network also intends to create an AM Observatory.

Workshop 2: Delivering training for new occupational profiles

Also in this workshop participants split into seven parallel groups.

The guiding questions were the following:

- How can Blueprint modules/curricula make use of the EQF as reference framework and how could they be included in national qualification frameworks?
- How can the ESCO classification support the preparation of modules/curricula?

The key message linked to this topic is that modules/curricula and qualifications should respect the EQF, but at the same time that should give enough space for national specificities, as eventually they will be implemented in national/regional contexts. Therefore, it is needed to involve NQF authorities to Blueprint projects from the beginning. Each partner should identify the relevant bodies for integration in NQF in its country. It could be beneficial to include national qualification institutes/bodies as partners or associated partners of the project.

The projects appreciated the methodology the EQF has set up, as it offers a common language in the field of qualifications. Companies helped to identify critical occupations. Then the EQF was helpful to position these in the system.



This was usually followed by the definition of knowledge, competences and skills (learning outcomes) for draft curricula. Some projects recommend using focus groups with VET providers to review curricula and skills levels. There was broad consensus that a Blueprint project should cover all VET levels, not only initial or higher VET. The participants considered it useful to use the learning outcomes approach when developing training modules. Thanks to this approach, modules can be used easier in other contexts or countries. Some projects decided not to develop, but only to review some qualifications, but also in this case the EQF level approach was/will be used. In some countries, it is easier to use EQF approach as it is already used at national level (e.g. Spain) or it is easier to update some parts of qualifications as they consist of compulsory and optional building blocks (e.g. Portugal). Blueprint projects bring to national qualifications new/missing skills e.g. green and digital skills, but also skills linked to circular economy. Another way of implementing project results in case of difficult integration in NQFs is to integrate them in internal training systems of companies using financial support from the relevant sector.

When reviewing qualifications the Blueprint projects have to take into account also the aspect of frequency as in some countries this is done only each 5 – 6 years, while in other countries reviews take place with higher frequency. It is also easier to update qualifications in higher VET (more flexibility and higher frequency at university level) than in initial VET.

Some projects use the descriptions of the qualification pillar of ESCO as the starting point for the definition of occupational profiles. Other projects will upgrade the existing profiles of ESCO, while also creating new ones. Sound knowledge of ESCO, but also systems used by industry that sometimes differ from ESCO or national qualification systems are key messages. It might be challenging to link ESCO profiles to appropriate EQF levels. The main task of Blueprint projects is to make an effort to overcome these differences by building bridges between ESCO and qualification / occupational systems applied by the world of work.

Many participants agreed that knowledge of its own national qualification/occupational systems is the most important starting point for development of training products. It is not sufficient to know the basics, but in-depth knowledge (what, who, why etc.) of national qualification/occupational systems is required as it helps to compare it with ESCO system.



There is a need to have the ESCO terminology accepted by the industry,

and in case, another terminology is used (f.e. job roles vs. occupations), to find a way to bridge the differences. It was noted that in practice there is a limited use of ESCO as it has many gaps. In addition, very few countries have linked their qualification systems to ESCO. Blueprint projects should work as bridge between ESCO and industry needs by reporting to ESCO skills that miss in the compendium: these are mostly job-specific but also transversal skills. Various SSA/Blueprint projects observed that the structure of ESCO profiles might be improved by accommodating cross-occupational skills. A clear example is in the field of IT. Today many occupations, and that will only increase in the future, need a certain level of IT skills. Currently, in ESCO these IT skills are described for each profile independently. This leads to a situation that more or less the same skills are described differently for different occupations. That may become a problem when (vocational) professionals want to change jobs, in maritime e.g. from off shore to on-shore, and achieved (IT) training and/or (ECVET credit) qualification are not recognized for another occupation. It would be beneficial if ESCO could harmonise general (IT) skills across occupation descriptions and/or develop a series of general (IT) skills level descriptions that can be referred to in occupation descriptions.

Participants agree that even with gaps and not always updated, one single system is needed. The ESCO team in the Commission welcomes feedback from the Blueprint projects about its current occupational profiles and information on the newly created occupations and skills. They could use the ESCO community forum to provide their feedback at <https://ec.europa.eu/esco/forum/> Today's labour markets require STEM, digital and green skills, and Blueprint projects bring to national qualifications these new/missing skills.

Involving qualification authorities and raising awareness of the work of the Blueprint projects is critical for their successful implementation.

Plenary 3: Making Blueprint deliverables sustainable

Ana Grigore (DG RTD) presented success factors for the sustainability of results of skills development projects. As already highlighted in the workshops 1, skills development, to become sustainable, needs to be based on scenarios of future challenges and trends.



Another factor is to link up with other initiatives in the sector, may they be at European level or at regional level. She then set out proposals how the Blueprint projects could continue after the end of EU funding, such as mapping potential target groups, maintaining and enlarging the network, kicking off a multiplier effect among stakeholders, and ensuring constant feedback loops from industry to education and vice versa.

Emanuele Barreca explained the scenario-based approach chosen by the Blueprint Alliance "Earth observation

from space” in order to transform from a project-based to a sustainable Alliance, and thus confirmed the previous presentation from a practical point of view. He added two further sustainability factors: making the project benefits visible to the sector and becoming a relevant part of the ecosystem.



In addition, ‘Knowledge Innovation Centres’ as users of the project results would have great potential as multipliers. Furthermore, the EO4GEO project is looking for links with the other Blueprints and to the Copernicus Programme in order to establish sustainable synergies.

Table discussions in the plenary room

The guiding questions for the table discussions were the following

- How do we maintain and update Blueprint project processes and deliverables?
- How can the national/regional structures help/obstruct this work?
- Who are the key actors in doing this?

First of all, the Blueprint network needs to be maintained and interested parties should be associated with it. As already mentioned in other workshops it is important to identify relevant national or regional actors that have systemic leverage. Then project results need to be presented in a way that demonstrates their value, so that stakeholders see the benefit and use

them. This could be supported by obtaining a quality label. In other words, a Blueprint Alliance needs to develop a business model in which it is not just a “skills provider” but a broker for other sectoral and regional stakeholders, also advising on funding sources. This also means that the project methodology becomes part of this business model. An example for this would be a quality labelled automated survey system (observatory) of the evolving skills needs in a sector and region that signals when skills updates are necessary; another example would be offering train-the-trainers services in order to disseminate the Blueprint training content or indeed to update skills when the said observatory signals it. The workshop 2 groups already highlighted that the integration of job profiles into ESCO and the NQF is also a way of sustaining project results

A representative of an ESF managing authority gave the very valuable advice that the Blueprint projects should address the coordinating authorities of the ESF and the ERDF, as well as the managing authorities of the ESF, with position papers on their project results in order to give the regional planning on sectors the right direction.



If they have the authority national/regional structures should engage with the Blueprint projects in the dissemination and exploitation of project results. As said above, if coordinating and managing authorities are informed, they can base their

planning on Blueprint findings, and thus prepare the ground for national/regional projects that roll-out European Blueprint results. Many items discussed in workshop 1 fall also under this chapter, and shall not be repeated here. Also European platforms that bring trans-regional cooperation forms together can support dissemination and exploitation: for example the Smart Specialisation Platform, the European Cluster Collaboration Platform or the European Network for the Transfer and Exploitation of EU Project Results.



Many key actors have already been mentioned in workshop 1 and around other issues of the table discussions. Main actors are of course the Blueprint partners themselves as national/regional actors, in particular VET providers that continue to use and update the curricula. Furthermore, European and national umbrella organisations that promote the results among its national respectively regional members, industry, in particular large companies with their value chain, integrating the results in its training structures, trade unions at all levels, or sector councils at any level can play an important role.

Concluding remarks

Alison Crabb from DG EMPL spoke the final words of this seminar.

She offered 'brokering' services to the Blueprint Alliances if they want to reach out to national or regional structures,

to public employment services for example.



She pointed out that we are in a transitional period and that it is necessary to bridge between the ongoing work on the implementation of the Skills Agenda from 2016 and the upcoming work of the new Commission, in particular the reinforced Skills Agenda, which will be published in March 2020.

Action points from the seminar

- Develop in-depth knowledge of the national qualification/occupational systems of the Blueprint partners
- Introduce the Blueprint project to the NQF authorities
- Feedback to ESCO team on Blueprint current occupational profiles and on newly created occupations and skills: <https://ec.europa.eu/esco/forum/> (ESCO community forum)
- ESCO could harmonise general (IT) skills across occupation descriptions and/or develop a series of general (IT) skills level descriptions that can be referred to in occupation descriptions.

- Identify specific regions in the countries of the partners which are specialised in their own Blueprint sectors or which have shown interest in the project
- Contact regions in EU Cluster Partnerships (European Cluster Collaboration Platform) or regions with smart specialisation strategies (Smart Specialisation Platform) in the Blueprint sectors - they will potentially see synergies with Blueprint project results
- Check ERA-NET² calls for skills development
- Address the coordinating authorities of the ESF and the ERDF, as well as the managing authorities of the ESF, with position papers on Blueprint project results

² ERA-NET under Horizon 2020 is a funding instrument designed to support public-public partnerships in their preparation, establishment of networking structures, design and implementation, and coordination of joint activities. The instruments mainly 'tops-up' funding for single joint calls and transnational actions.

