



33 rue Joseph Jacquard
FR – 68840 – PULVERSHEIM

**ANTICIPATING STRUCTURAL CHANGES IN AGRICULTURE: THE POSSIBILITY
OF SETTING UP A EUROPEAN SECTOR COUNCIL**

**OVERVIEW REPORT
ON THE FEASIBILITY STUDY**

Brussels, September 2012

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I. PREFACE

The contents of this report¹ form one part of a wider whole, in that the project for which EFFAT obtained Commission co-financing covers the following issues:

- *"To promote exchanges of information and experience as part of the attempt to devise activities associated with the impact on jobs and skills of climate change and the development of organic products. In this connection, we intend to ascertain which measures and means have been employed in efforts to adapt know-how in farm businesses and smallholdings, and also to establish the disparities or synergies that have arisen between these two types of farm;*
- *To focus in particular on the role played by women in these processes and to promote equal opportunities whenever restructuring takes place that is accompanied by a plan for saving jobs and developing workers' skills;*
- *To embark on a path aimed at setting up a European Sector Council for agriculture*
- *To devise a campaign to raise the awareness of the partners in the project, systematically taking account of the factors of stress and resistance to change".*

This report falls under point 3: *"to embark on a path aimed at setting up a European Sector Council for agriculture"*, addressing at least three aspects:

- a) what type of information the ESC should produce at regional and national level (where "regional" can be interpreted as a border region, for example)
- b) what contribution representatives of education and training providers can make, and the relationship they will have to develop with the social partners;
- c) what other possible actions the ESC might need to develop (wide dissemination of information, Preventive Management Planning for Employment and Skills (GPPEC) schemes, etc.).

¹ The technical part, i.e., including the survey feedback and its processing, is dealt with in a specific chapter in the comprehensive report.

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However, to broaden the sweep of discussions for decision-making, a good case can be made for starting by revisiting and/or outlining a number of considerations (views, studies, comparisons) garnered at different levels. Thereafter, an attempt will be made to address the key issues of your project, drawing on the interviews and discussions that took place:

- either in the questionnaires returned; or
- at the roundtables held in three countries, broken down into three distinct zones:

	Zone 1 - North	Zone 2 - Balkans	Zone 3 - Southern Europe
Countries	Germany - Sweden - Poland	Bulgaria - Romania - Croatia	Spain - France - Italy

As the process moved forward, the many questions raised and interest generated led other countries to join in, including:

Austria - Denmark - Slovakia - Czech Republic - Slovenia - Portugal

This unplanned expansion yielded a broader range of views on whether an ESC should be set up. However, the base questionnaire did not always yield hard information, since these countries' self-inclusion was more about engaging with an issue that was new to them.

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II. GENERAL OBSERVATIONS: THE ECORYS STUDY and REACTIONS

The Commission proposal on setting up EU-level Sector Councils on Employment and Skills goes to a critical issue: the need for forums where social dialogue and public policies interact to promote individual and collective skills development. That proposal forms part of the New Skills for New Jobs initiative launched in 2008.

The European Commission contracted with the ECORYS consultancy to produce a study "to assess the feasibility of setting up Sector Councils on employment and skills at the European level (EU level Sector Councils)". That three-point study (objectives, conclusions and general recommendations) in English (executive summary in French) is available on its website at www.ecorys.com and the Commission's at <http://ec.europa.eu>

It is a feasibility report that undertakes a comparative review of existing institutions and practices in the countries of the European Union. From it, practical recommendations are elicited for setting up such Sector Councils:

- set realistic objectives;
- leverage voluntary participation by stakeholders;
- secure temporary, conditional Commission support based on pre-agreed targets, close monitoring of the process and a thorough evaluation of outputs;
- put an initial focus on exchange of information between the social partners;
- network national organisations to create communities of practice.

As to methodology, the ECORYS study concludes, among other things, that as regards the existence of sectoral councils or similar structures:

Twenty-two EU Member States (MS) have at least one type of council. The report considers that their overall number could well be over 2,500. There is no questioning the dynamism of the European agriculture sector from this point of view, but a full count is no easy matter in the context of this project, as will be seen below. 13 of the 27 Member States have at least one sector council at national level, which may be for initial vocational training and education and/or continuing vocational training. The study reports having identified 19 "series" of sector councils in all in 13 MS. In some of these MS – plus others - the report identifies 25 sector and transversal councils with similar tasks and structures in initial vocational education. The largest MS, finally, usually have sector councils at national level as well as "umbrella" transversal

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councils in which issues common to the sectoral councils are discussed and decided upon. The smaller MS, the report notes, have just one transversal sector council under which a series of sectoral working groups operate.

All these Sector and Transversal Councils have one common objective: to improve the match on the labour market between demand and supply (in quantitative and/or qualitative terms). The ECORYS executive summary interestingly notes that these Councils can implement a variety of activities:

- Analyse quantitative trends in the labour market;
- Analyse qualitative trends in the labour market;
- Develop policy proposals to bridge quantitative gaps
- Develop policy proposals to bridge qualitative gaps; foster cooperation between firms and vocational education and training (VET) providers;
- Implement programmes / actions to bridge the gaps.

These various Councils in the EU are rarely evaluated, however. Where they are evaluated - as in the United Kingdom and Canada, for example – success is measured by the use of outputs by companies and their satisfaction with those outputs. This is definitely something to consider for the European Sector Councils through a partnership arrangement.

The report also sets out the conditions for implementation (feasibility) at EU level. It finds four determinants of interest in participation. Interest is higher among organizations with a clear link to a specific sector, provided the people and organizations concerned are convinced of its usefulness. The social partners are more inclined to participate in these Councils, provided what are felt to be the important objectives are clearly defined. Foremost among these are the promotion of continuing vocational training (CVT) and the responsiveness of the education sector to employment market needs. Trade unionists have a clear preference for the joint development of policies and actions. Another important point made is the issue of funding, in particular payment of the costs incurred for working meetings. This is where technical support from the EU is required.

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In its detailed analytical report, ECORYS makes seven recommendations:

1. *Proceed with promoting EU level Sector Councils for Employment and Skills.* It will be seen below that while this approach is still at its earliest beginnings, a number of sectors have initiated the process of, or started thinking about, setting up a sector council.
2. *Set realistic objectives and expectations:* while "realistic" is very much the right word here, this is not to say that expectations cannot also be ambitious, as evidenced, for example, by the agricultural social partners' avowed aim to get to grips long-term with the issues of migrant workers and sustainable agriculture, for example.
3. *Any EU initiative to promote such Councils should ensure commitment from stakeholders by making participation voluntary and support temporarily, and depending on achievements agreed upon in advance.*
4. *Make EU support dependent on a few stringent conditions and agreement on targets at the application stage and participation in monitoring and evaluation measures.* Evaluation is key.
5. *Promote co-operation with existing EU initiatives, notably in the fields of labour market trends and education & training.*
6. *Put initial focus on information exchange and on social partners, consider a multi-stage involvement of the corresponding stakeholders.* This is what EFFAT is considering going with.
7. *Establish a Transversal Council with a limited number of objectives.*

The Commission subsequently endorsed the report's proposed approach and spelled out its point of view in a staff working document of July 2010. It suggests that the Sector Councils should be a complementary body open to players other than simply the social partners. The discussion on this point in the EU agriculture sector put forward a range of scenarios for the composition or role of structures other than simply the social partners. This is considered further below.

Calling for a new impetus in the sectoral dialogue, the Commission considers employment and skills to be an essential focus of such dialogue for informing public policymaking. "*Taking part in sectoral skills councils (or ESC) can help social partners to get involved in joint actions with other partners as a complement to their autonomous dialogue*". The Commission emphasizes the autonomy of the social

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partners in initiating, developing and setting the agenda of ESCs. But at the same time, it sets out its own vision of their purpose, which on this point is at least debatable. The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) issued opinions (exploratory in the EESC's case) calling for more ambitious policy aims than those recommended in the ECORYS report. These opinions are looked at below.

This is the general background against which the ETUC commissioned the ALPHA consultancy to canvass the views of the European industry federations, specifically on the Commission's proposal and vision for setting up ESCs. Ten federations were interviewed: EFBWW, EFFAT, EMCEF, EMF, EPSU (Public Utilities), EPSU (Health and Social Services), ETF, UNI-Europa (Commerce), Uni-Europa (ICTS), and ETUF-TCL. The main conclusion of this survey is couched in the following terms:

"The federations expressed common interest in the proposal, with a wide range of subtle differences. There is still a widespread feeling among trade unionists that employers are often more reluctant than unions to move forward in this direction, in particular because employers prefer to manage skills on a company level. The trade union federations welcome the *New Skills for New Jobs* initiative in the light of the challenges facing Europeans. In this context, the Sector Councils could become interesting resource hubs for:

- developing consistent forward-looking studies providing social partners with *operational* information.
- *networking* national councils and observatories to enable a fruitful sharing of experience.

Beyond these commonalities and differences, there are further questions being raised among trade unionists:

- What is the *right sectoral scope* needing to be covered by one Council?
 - is the scope *wide*, thereby encouraging the transferability of skills and individual employability (e.g. the whole fashion industry)?
 - or is it *limited*, thereby sticking to employment realities (e.g. several distinct sub-sectors in the metalworking industry)?
- What is the *right level of linkage with the Sectoral Social Dialogue Committees (SSDC)*? There is a consensus among trade unions that leadership of the Councils must be in the hands of the social partners. Even so, practical relations between the Councils and the SSDC remain in need of clarification, with an explicit necessity to avoid any bureaucratic overlapping and to look for complementary tasks. Are the Councils to be *independent* or are they to be *subordinated* to the Committees, with

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the latter playing a steering role in determining the Councils' work programme and supervising their work? At present the design is not yet clear.

– What is the *right level of involvement of civic and social players* other than the social partners? A certain consensus would seem to exist on the involvement of vocational training institutions, inputting expertise and activities in this crucial area. But we need to tread carefully with regard to the involvement of other players, with trade unionists frequently questioning the legitimacy of such involvement and the representativeness of such players”.

F While the present report lays no claim to offer a definitive answer, the discussions on looking into the setting-up of an ESC for agriculture must address these three aspects – and especially the participation of civic and social stakeholders other than the social partners - in objective, joined-up terms. Our surveys in the sector (based, it bears recalling, on a questionnaire initially administered to 9 MS) clearly show the need for leadership to be exercised by the social partners. The options looked at address these issues, although as yet in a very vestigial form.

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III - PRACTICE IN QUEBEC: FOOD FOR THOUGHT?

For reasons akin to those of the European Union, Canada carried out a wide-ranging discussion on how to bring about credible, socially acceptable and economically feasible solutions. The result was the "CSMO" or Sectoral Workforce Committees (SWC) based on the fundamental principle of partnership.

"(The) sector-based workforce committees (are) composed of representatives of employer associations, business and industry, trade unions and labour associations in each of the target sectors of economic activity ... recognized on the basis of active partnership (and) willingness to build consensus ... (whose) responsibilities consist in defining the needs in their specific sectors, recommending means for stabilizing employment and reducing unemployment, and developing lifelong learning". This is the official description of Canada's equivalent of a sector council given on the English page of the Quebec Ministry of Employment and Social Solidarity's website at emploiquebec.net.

Broadly, there are three stages in the development of a sectoral workforce committee

Ø Consensus-building activities	Û Development activities	Ū Operational activities
Usually the first 12 to 24 months	Usually during the next 6 to 9 months	Ongoing
Get industry feedback to identify an overt interest in the sector-based committee approach; Get support and involvement from key stakeholders; Get consensus on common human resource issues facing the industry; Establish a committee of stakeholders to define the sectoral committee's remit and scope of activities.	Form a governing board and fill the chief executive and administrative assistant posts; Develop a mission statement and remit; Draw up a five-year plan; Get industry support for the organizational structure and programme of activities; Form the committee as an incorporated not-for-profit organisation.	Implement the programmed activities; Develop and implement a communication plan to publicise the committee; Review the programmes of activities and strategic plans annually; Update the administrative structure and governing board as required.

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SWCs are usually formed once the sector stakeholders (business, trade unions and education providers) have agreed to work together to identify and address their sector's current and future human resources and skills issues: such an approach is fully in line with the Preventive Management Planning for Employment and Skills (GPPEC) process on which EFFAT worked up a project two years ago. It will be recalled that this project encountered issues with the definition of the concept between Member States, notwithstanding the innovative schemes and achievements in several of them. Also, the issue is addressed differently in different countries to reflect the agriculture sector's VSE² structure. Area-based management schemes have been developed, particularly in France, whose outputs could usefully inform this project. This will be discussed at more length later.

The above table makes no mention of how a particular sector would be identified, but it would seem to be done on official figures. This may not necessarily be the right method for the EU to adopt, and that also probably applies to the agricultural sector given the interplay between different sectors (agriculture, food and drink, etc.).

As sectoral workforce committees have distinct legal personality, they must be governed by a board of directors elected by the members of the industry representing different stakeholder groups (e.g., business, trade unions, education providers and other groups specific to the industries in that sector). This kind of arrangement is markedly different from the typical set-up in the EU.

There are currently 35 national sectoral workforce committees funded under a specific programme, the "sectoral workforce committees programme", one of which is for the agriculture sector (also discussed later). These sectoral workforce committees plan and carry out activities to anticipate and solve skills and labour market issues affecting their sector, including:

- developing labour market information materials to enable businesses to plan their investments in human resources and projects;
- developing national occupational standards to facilitate labour mobility (including for apprentices), help shape training programmes and promote health and safety in the workplace;

² VSE: Very Small Enterprises
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- run targeted recruitment and professional development initiatives to increase labour market participation and inclusion of under-represented groups like indigenous peoples and immigrants;
- strive to see that training programmes address industry needs;
- devise skills development tools, including online training;
- develop core skills initiatives;
- develop tools and approaches for integrating foreign-trained workers.

All these matters are present concerns for the social partners in the EU, not least and especially the agricultural sector, through the existence of tools at varying stages of advancement, like AGRIPASS to name but one. Europe's diversity is without a shadow of a doubt a real asset which we would argue must inform the question of setting up an ESC.

The presentation on which this summary is based outlines the benefits that each partner draws from these sector-based committees. It will be recalled that there are three categories of stakeholder: trade unions, businesses and education providers.

BENEFITS CLAIMED FOR ...	
WORKERS	<p>Have access to relevant and practical in-service training;</p> <p>Are better prepared for change and upheaval in work environments;</p> <p>Enjoy greater job mobility;</p> <p>Can fulfil their potential in the labour market.</p>
EMPLOYERS	<p>Can offer new services and learning opportunities to their workers;</p> <p>Can contribute fully to the development of in-service learning and skills development strategies to meet their needs;</p> <p>Are better able to plan for and address emerging labour market issues;</p> <p>Through a productive and skilled workforce, can gain a leading edge that is vital in today's competitive markets.</p>

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EDUCATION PROVIDERS	Facilitating industry-education system relations; Curricula reflect and address sectoral needs.
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This approach also acts as a baseline to facilitate “perfect” competition.

The role of trade unions: Worker participation is fundamental to the structure of a sectoral committee. The industry partners work together to specify the composition of the sectoral committee’s governing body by reference to the sector characteristics. Depending on the composition of the sector workforce, the workers are represented in the sectoral committee by trade unions, employee associations, professional associations or groups officially recognized by the sector workers.

The CSMO for agriculture in Quebec - called "Agricarrières" - represents 30,000 mostly family farms, and brings together more than a score of specializations. Farm businesses employ approximately 128,000 persons. This sectoral committee’s remit covers a wide range of matters, revolving around the following issues:

CHALLENGES	SOLUTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Human resource management is a big new challenge for the development of farm businesses. - Longer job spells for seasonal agricultural workers are becoming critical to attracting and retaining labour. - Agriculture must be able to draw on a sufficiently large, highly-trained labour market to develop. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Upgrade and promote agricultural jobs - Consolidate the strategies developed to improve access to agricultural jobs - Develop and implement in-service learning to maximise the potential skill pool for farm worker positions

To deliver on all this, the agriculture sectoral committee:

- Established the "Agrijob" labour hire service to fill seasonal and casual employment in the surrounding regions,
- Created a comprehensive database on agricultural training (www.agritalent.ca) in 2009, containing a bilingual database listing over a thousand training programmes and courses in agriculture offered by more than 200 training providers across the country.

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IV - THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE'S POSITION

The (exploratory) EESC opinion, parts of which are discussed below, differs somewhat from that of the trade unions. So, the Committee believes that while future European Sector Councils should conduct close and regular cooperation with their national counterparts, they should also constitute a platform which should include the social partners, education and training institutions and organisations, institutions, organisations and public authorities, professional associations and organisations providing vocational education and training (VET) and initial vocational education and training (IVET). This is a much broader approach than many trade union organizations would wish and may fall foul of various difficulties: how can dynamic synergies be developed in such a broad framework? What role do the social partner organizations have? Who exercises leadership? Also, the EESC opinion also calls for not only employers' and workers' representatives, but also those of training providers and public authorities to be involved in running ESCs: the trade unions believe this could be a stumbling block.

The opinion also suggests that they should have a sectoral focus, i.e., concentrating on sectors in the broad sense and dealing with occupations that are specific to the sector concerned: no clear choice is made as to the scope of an ESC's activities, but arguably this proposal differs somewhat from those voiced by the social partners questioned.

Other proposals seem to fall in fully with what the unions have in contemplation, such as:

- developing strong strategic partnerships, which means building relationships with secondary schools, institutions providing vocational training services for school leavers, higher education establishments, and businesses: this is something EFFAT has examined, but the project scope did not lend itself to a comprehensive survey.

Considering the ties between European sectoral councils, on the one hand, and Cedefop and Eurofound, on the other hand, the EESC considers that structural and information-based support for the work of sectoral councils by Cedefop and Eurofound should be taken into account in the designation of the tasks of these institutions, and calls for additional means to resource these foundations. Other studies also recommend an increased use of these foundations which could be a genuinely worthwhile input for the stakeholders.

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V - THE EUROPEAN TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION'S POSITION

The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) supports the Communication of the European Commission "An Agenda for New Skills and New Jobs" but declares that this agenda needs to be placed in a new employment strategy and a new labour market which observes and respects labour standards and social rights.

The ETUC agrees with the comments of László Andor, the Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, that *"our priority is to get people working. We simply cannot afford an unemployment rate of 10%."* The ETUC is also in agreement with Androulla Vassiliou, the Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth, that *"it is more than ever crucial that all citizens receive high quality education and training to equip with the skills they need to find work"*. In its own study In favour of a trade union version of the New Skills for New Jobs initiative, the ETUC would like to underline the following:

- ▶ Europe's ability to play an active role in the global economy depends upon the upskilling of workers, but within the context of an inclusive labour market.
- ▶ Sector Councils on Employment and Skills could become a useful forum for sharing best practices and experiences, but they must be in the hands of the social partners and complementary to the Sector Social Dialogue Committees.
- ▶ The move towards a learning outcomes approach, and the recognition and validation of skills, calls for the adjustment of business models within companies, which in turn should have a positive effect on the pay and employability of workers.
- ▶ The learning outcomes approach equips workers for changes in the labour market because employability is more easily recognized; it also helps employers gain a better overview of existing skills, and not just those described within qualifications.
- ▶ For labour markets to function properly, suitable regulation is needed in terms of uniform frameworks, transparent methods and accreditation bodies responsible for the certification of skills.
- ▶ The long-proclaimed European goal of life-long learning contrasts sharply with the situation on the ground: access for all to Continuing Vocational and Educational Training needs to improve markedly.

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F *The ETUC position is very clear that leadership of the Sector Councils on Employment must be with the social partner organizations, and they must be complementary to the Sector Social Dialogue Committees.*

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VI - THE AGRICULTURE SECTOR: STOCKTAKING REPORT

In 2010, European agricultural work was done by 11 million AWUs (Annual Work Units, corresponding to 11 million full-time equivalent workers. While there is no general consensus about this indicator, the trend in it does provide a credible measure of employment). Agricultural output volume stood at €347 billion, of which the EU-15 accounted for €293 billion (source: Eurostat). This ranks the EU second only in the world to China. These few figures illustrate the importance of the sector, notwithstanding that its contribution to the EU's GDP is less significant than the volume of employment it represents.

The challenges the sector faces from growing globalisation:

This report does not set out to detail all the challenges facing agricultural production, but rather to pick out various matters that point up the issues arising in social partner dialogues, and effectively, therefore, in any future sector council on employment. For this, we have drawn on a document published by COPA-GEOPA setting out eight priority issues without further analytical and/or political comment

- Food security and stability for 500 million consumers
- Food safety, choice, quality and information for consumers
- The competitiveness of EU agriculture – reasonable prices for consumers and reasonable incomes for farmers
- Sustainable production which protects the land and environment and respects animal welfare
- Employment for over 40 million people
- Diversity and production throughout all regions of the EU
- Enabling farmers to provide additional public services - an attractive countryside, biodiversity, water management...
- Meeting the challenge of climate change

Agriculture is in a near-permanent state of restructuring, but in very different forms in the regions that make up the EU (the perceived priorities of the newer Member States do not all match those of the older MS).

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The social partners have engaged with various issues at a national, regional or European level. The national and European social partners' sights are set on improving sector competitiveness and at the same time enabling the development of sustainable, good quality jobs. On this point, however, a clear line must be drawn between broad policy aims and practices that are if not contentious then at least questionable. Arguably, therefore, other priorities could be added to those which a future European Sector Council on Employment will have to address:

- Transparent labour recruitment practices, especially hire of migrant workers: a 2007/2008 EFFAT study on the growth of illegal work highlights persistent but also new practices with the emergence of new seasonal labour gangmasters;
- Rural regeneration, especially via incomer migrant families;
- The appeal of agricultural occupations, to be addressed objectively without no-go areas;
- Integration of migrant workers and using acquired skills not only in work in a host country but also in connection with return to the country of origin;
- The geographical and occupational mobility needed to cope with current and future structural changes;
- Inclusion for workers with a disability, and the role of social agriculture;
- The efficiency of schemes that have been running for several years (AGRIPASS, Preventive Management Planning for Employment and Skills [GPPEC], Agreement on Training, etc.)

The assignment we were commissioned for – of which this overview report is only one part – included collecting in and analysing a questionnaire initially administered to nine countries, subsequently extended to fifteen in all. That questionnaire covered four broad topics:

1. Joint or differently-structured bodies, observatories, etc. on which to base the approach
2. What should a Sector Council for Employment do
3. How training should be organised
4. What composition the ESC should have

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This report does not give a detailed analysis of the questionnaire results (see separate document), but a condensed version of them.

1. The core structures on which to base the approach: not all countries were able to answer this question. However, the responses evidence a very wide variety of practices, types of organization, structures and degrees of social partner involvement. At this stage of the analysis, two (provisional) conclusions can be drawn from this:
 - a. There is a real potential for network-building;
 - b. But the list needs to be extended and involve other stakeholders than just the trade unions (scenario devised for the co-financing application for this project)
2. What should an ESC do: 4 ideas were worked up to supplement the presentation of the study findings (the ECORYS study in particular) at meetings:

Coordinate employment, training, innovation at EU level	Proceed with an exhaustive search for ideas EU-wide	Develop a "bridge" between education/training and working life	Get consensus in the union positions
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3. Organization of training: one inescapable general conclusion: it is not possible to harmonize practices as diverse as those returned by the surveys. More identification work must be done with an expanded panel of respondents. However, the evidence of the interviews and discussions is that training providers need to be represented in, although not full members of, an ESC.
4. What composition should an ESC have: most responses tend towards leadership being exercised by the social partners, although some - mainly in south-eastern Europe – want government to be involved; such a proposal, however, can only pertain to a national council. But also, the majority view is that this proposal must be put to and discussed with the European employers' organization.

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(Provisional) conclusion:

The issue of a European Sector Council for Employment and Skills dealt with in the project on *"Anticipating structural changes in agriculture: the possibility of setting up a European Sector Council"* forms part of a larger whole formed of four distinct points. It is a preliminary forward study that is proceeding in a different manner to other similar approaches. The following list is unlikely to be comprehensive as situations are changing all the time:

SECTORS	PROCEDURE
COMMERCE	The European social partners (UNI-Europa Commerce and Eurocommerce), held three regional workshops in 2010 on anticipating skills needs and vocational training challenges in commerce involving other stakeholders, in particular training providers. A final conference was to decide what action to take on the process
TEXTILE-LEATHER-CLOTHING	There is a long tradition of forward studies in this highly-competitive and heavily-globalized sector. The Federation is in the process of networking existing organizations
METALLURGY	The 1st stage got under way by identifying the stakeholders in the two sectors of the steel and motor manufacturing industry.
SHIPBUILDING	The identification process is well under way
CHEMICALS	A forward study process was put in hand at a conference in April 2011.

EFFAT has a demonstrable commitment to moving steadily forward on the matter, but by stages. In this regard, canvassing its member organizations is a democratic process appropriate to the circumstances to give shape to the project.

The work done - especially through the first three surveys and three decentralized meetings – suggest this is a process to be taken forward, the groundwork for which can be taken to be a synthesis of the work done, namely:

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1. A concise summary presentation of the topics that an ESC for agriculture must address:

The document sets the context by listing the reasons for wanting to set up an ESC, emphasizing the ongoing changes in European agriculture and a list of topics that the ESC must deal with. As it has not been finalized and adopted at the time of writing this report, it is not reproduced here.

2. Formulation of a general proposal as a basis for discussion with the European employers' organization

This is couched in general terms and has yet to be amended in plenary. It is formulated as a five-point proposal

1) Sequence:

- Presentation by EFFAT at the final conference followed by a discussion with GEOPA.
- Presentation of the conference work to the September sectoral social dialogue committee.

2) The sector council's role:

- Discussion and amendment of the abovementioned points and development of conclusions.
- The SQC works at the social dialogue committee's behest.
- The sectoral social dialogue committee on agriculture is the sole decision-making body, and also specifies the SQC's composition.

3) Composition of the SQC: three distinct groups

GROUP 1	GROUP 2	GROUP 3
8 members from EFFAT regions	Some government bodies, e.g.:	Representative training enablers from MS, such as:
8 from GEOPA (appointed by it)	SNCP for Spain; NaBiB for Germany; and scientists	FAFSEA for France Or the Chamber of Labour for Austria.

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4) Operation:

A council secretariat to be set up to work in close conjunction with the 2 secretariats of the European social partners: EFFAT and GEOPA. The composition is to be determined by EFFAT and GEOPA. EFFAT is against any outside involvement.

There will be two meetings a year, and the secretariat will handle everyday business between meetings. Subject-specific working groups can be set up.

5) The council's remit:

- To take into account matters on which the partners are agreed
- To take into account the requests of the social partners on the social dialogue committee.
- To develop transparency on employment and skills in agriculture.
- To identify and mainstream good practices into EU employment policy.
- To transfer good practices and implement innovations at national level: EIP: Europe Innovation Partners
- To coordinate the work of the national sector councils.

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VII - RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DISCUSSION

At the outcome of this first stage, a number of issues arguably need to be worked up further. The project was, of course, intended to initiate a forward study into – not to result in – the setting up of a European Sector Council for agriculture.

This is therefore a timely juncture at which to mark out ways forward and recommendations to move on to the second stage: setting up a European Sector Council, should the social partners decide to do so.

To summarize the approach so far:

The issues set for the project focus have been addressed in terms of this forward study phase. Seven issues were to be looked at in the nine partner countries:

POINT 1 OF THE FORWARD STUDY - P1	RESULTS
Identify and locate the national and/or regional sectoral bodies within the European Union (observatories, research establishments, sector councils, training funds, etc.) which, at the sectoral level, produce information about anticipating the skills required on the labour market and about the inadequacy of skills.	Several countries gave fairly detailed situation reports, including in supplementary reports accompanying the questionnaire. Further information was given at decentralized meetings attended by other stakeholders than just the social partners.
<i>Recommendation: this process (partial, because involving a bare 1/3 of MS returning sometimes incomplete responses) should be taken forward involving partners and/or stakeholders other than just the trade unions</i>	

POINT 2 OF THE FORWARD STUDY - P2	RESULTS
Identify the networks and organisations representing providers of education and training in the agricultural sector.	As above, but in some cases in greater detail where joint structures with a strong union presence exist
<i>Recommendation: same recommendation as for P1</i>	

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POINT 3 OF THE FORWARD STUDY - P3	RESULTS
Establish contacts and organise meetings with the councils and representatives of the identified education and training providers with a view to presenting the ESC concept to them and ascertaining their degree of interest in the initiative as well as their desire to take part in a European Sector Council themselves	Only a partial start has been made on this process, but it has secured the attendance of stakeholders other than just the social partners at some meetings
<i>Recommendation: the process must be taken forward on a more formal basis with co-financing from the Commission</i>	

POINT 4 OF THE FORWARD STUDY - P4	RESULTS
Define and evaluate the type of information that these national and regional sector councils need to exchange and the potential contribution that the representatives of education and training providers could make	Initial investigations have been carried out in the nine countries concerned plus those that voluntarily joined afterwards.
<i>Recommendation: take forward by informing/questioning the other MS</i>	

POINT 5 OF THE FORWARD STUDY - P5	RESULTS
Based on a list and evaluation, to pre-select sector councils and representatives of the education and training providers likely to participate in a European Sector Council.	The process is uncompleted, except in the odd individual, especially where joint structures are involved
<i>Recommendation: professionalize the process in all 27 MS with involvement of local social partners through Commission co-financing</i>	

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POINT 6 OF THE FORWARD STUDY - P6	RESULTS
Identify other potential forms of actions that the sector council could develop, for instance the dissemination of information among other recipients (SMEs, ministries and such like).	Other types of actions are recommended in the report (Chapters 2 and 4)
<i>Recommendation: social partner discussions to reach an agreement on the principle and content to be included</i>	

The 7de PROSPECTIVE STUDY POINT - P7	RESULTS
Based on a list of potential participants and meetings with them, to produce a feasibility study on the establishment of a European Sector Council and define the form it should take in the event that the stakeholders decide to set one up. That document should also set out the reasoned decision taken by the sector's representatives (especially the European social partners) about whether or not to set up a European Sector Council on employment and skills.	This point is central to this report which considers that the action should be taken forward on the basis of the discussions being further informed by including some of the recommendations made in this document as finalized at the last meeting of the project partners
<i>Recommendation: discussions, decisions at the last meeting of project partners</i>	

Further work:

The feasibility report ordered by the European Commission from the ECORYS consultancy (2010) carries out a comparative review of existing practices and institutions in EU countries. It puts forward pragmatic recommendations listed in Chapter Two of this report. Going back to the question of setting "realistic" objectives and expectations: without seeking to set a hard-and-fast course going forwards, it can arguably be said that:

- The scope of investigation in the agricultural sector is wide enough for the scope of such objectives to be congruent with all the sector's priorities;

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- These priorities should be thoroughly discussed with the European employers' organization;
- These discussions should also focus on issues where differences might arise

In the same vein, the comments, analyses, remarks and opinions contained in this document should inform the project partners' discussions for further action. The example of Canada reported in Chapter 3 may be something that could provide general food for thought.

Specifically, the next steps can be formulated as follows:

At the final meeting, the project partners must:

- Take a stance that will get the employers' organization to voluntarily sign up to the next stages of work;
- State how they see an ESC being organized: its role, composition, remit;
- Put out a social partner joint position on the principle of getting an implementation process under way and argue it in the sectoral social dialogue committee;
- Take the investigations forward on several points, requesting financial support from the Commission. Drawing on the foregoing analysis, those points could include:
 - Proceed with identifying national (or regional) organizations engaged in research and publication of information on skills development in the 27 MS involving different partners and/or participants;
 - Proceed with identifying networks and organisations representing education and training providers in the sector concerned in the 27 MS involving different partners and/or participants;
 - Professionalize the establishing of contacts and organisation of meetings with the councils and representatives of the identified education and training providers with a view to presenting the European Sector Council concept to them and ascertaining their degree of interest in the initiative as well as their desire to take part in a European Sector Council themselves in the 27 MS involving different partners and/or participants;

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- Based on a list and evaluation, pre-select sector councils and education and training provider organizations likely to participate in a European Sector Council, specify their involvement in it, as part of a voluntary approach in the 27 MS involving different partners and/or participants.

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