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1. INTRODUCTION: AIMS AND DEFINITIONS OF THE STRATEGY PLAN FRAMEWORK

The aim of the deliverable D3.1, as described in the application, is to develop a Strategy Plan Framework. This framework follows a classification mapping of the divergence of existing Maritime Education and Training (MET) provision and of potential stakeholders in terms of the range of decision-makers and of professions involved, and the dynamic of the number, divergence and strength of internal SkillSea MET stakeholders. This classification has been used to accommodate different perspectives and to arrive at a common strategy to approach the creation of future-proof skills provided through the European MET system. Following a detailed and extensive Delphi consultation and using input from relevant deliverables on current and future skills, a strategy plan was developed involving tools and instruments, specific milestones for the development process and a description of outputs and their impact on jobs in the maritime sector. The strategy plan framework will help to secure high-quality labour skills in the maritime transport sector through appropriate mechanisms to upgrade European MET provision and impact through appropriate specifications of an educational content fit to cater for the sector's trends.

Together with flexible and adaptable mechanisms, this strategy plan framework will create a set of tools that will help more frequent updating of the knowledge and skills required to 'future-proof' maritime professionals, taking into account the trends towards increasing transferability and mobility. This is required in the context of SkillSea's main strategic aims: the provision of upgradable and flexible Vocational Education and Training solutions capable of keeping abreast of new developments and the selection and promotion of transferability methodology and tools.

The strategy plan framework is based on the five general strategic directions of the SkillSea sectoral alliance on future-proof maritime skills:

1. Support maritime professional paths.
2. Close the skills gap.
3. Set strategic goals.
4. Develop tools within the strategic framework.
5. Update the framework for the long term.

The proposed strategy plan framework is generic and valid for all main possible scenarios concerning the evolution of the demand for maritime professionals across the areas of the sector which SkillSea focuses on, as well as ensuing scenarios or ranges of future mismatches.

The maritime sector cluster is made up of a wide variety of different industries in which technological, organisational and regulatory developments lead to changes in skills needed, which in turn raise new demands upon maritime education and training. In this respect, the strategic vision of the delivered report takes into account all the main stakeholders, such as government/public authorities, maritime sector, education and training providers. It makes extensive use of the large sectoral partnerships to select and promote common goals and tools in a participatory way. As with all seven Work Package 3 deliverables, the time-horizons on which Deliverable 3.1 focuses, beyond the immediate/short term, are a medium-term horizon of two to up to five years and a long-term horizon extending to 15 years.

2. SUMMARY OF SECTORAL TRENDS AND WORKFORCE CHALLENGES

The current transformation in shipping involves new elements focused on sustainability, the introduction of new technologies, entrepreneurial leadership and soft skills. Examples of the first category include healthy work environments, energy, climate change and the conservation of marine life. Examples of the second category include automation – potentially towards autonomous ships – block chain applied in shipping commercial operations, cloud and ICT/cybersecurity applications in general. All these changes accelerate the need to strengthen and update the related skills of maritime professionals. More future skills can be found in the deliverables on Future Skill and Competence needs of Work Package 1.

3. CURRENT DISRUPTIONS AND SEA SKILLS: THE CHALLENGE

As far as attracting and retaining maritime professionals are concerned, Europe is faced with the sector's inherent weaknesses (such as significant market cyclicity, lack of clear directions about future career paths, and lack of new skills templates) but also with the sector's several strengths (such as resilient employment demand, substantial social and horizontal mobility). Equally, despite the existence of certain threats (including uncertainty caused by Covid-19, lower growth, and the substitution of the human element by new technology), significant opportunities also lie ahead (such as new technologies or regulations creating new posts and sustainability leading to higher skill work content).

The consequences of such disruptions for the related strategy conclusions can be summarised as follows:

1. Any Vocational Educational Training (VET) solution designed in SkillSea has to accommodate the proliferation of the use of current (and future) innovative technologies.
2. Regular refresher courses on foundation knowledge through modern delivery methods should be considered for all maritime professionals.
3. Suitable (combined) state-of-the-art delivery methods of blended education and training should be applied (such as modular, flexible and distance-learning).

4. THE SKILLSEA STRATEGY FRAMEWORK PROPOSAL

AIMS IN A VIRTUAL CIRCLE CONTEXT

The mission of the SkillSea project revolves around the following three main, interconnected aims: employability; retention; and attraction and mobility. An example of this connection is that eliminating skills mismatches improves employability, which then improves attraction and retention, which, in turn, creates increased appeal and more opportunities for mobility.

GOALS

The essential SkillSea goals formulated in the grant application were confirmed in the Delphi surveys executed in this Work Package 3. These goals are:

1. Ensuring that current and future European seafarers are equipped with the right skills.
2. Promoting a high-quality maritime education system in Europe.
3. Ensuring continuous coordination and matching of skills to industry needs.
4. Facilitating career paths from sea to new specialisations on land.
5. Retaining and retraining current personnel on board.
6. Increasing mobility across levels of maritime education.

In order to achieve maximum transferability, SkillSea will use the system of 'learning outcomes' as an instrument, as these are the foundation of European Union tools reflected in European directions about mutual recognition of educational modules/packages based on European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP), European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) elements. SkillSea can also borrow parts of the International Maritime Organisation Standards of Training and Watch keeping Convention approach, which essentially covers competence certification awarded on the basis of various study routes and educational levels. Combining these with current European vocational training directions on transferability and recognition based on learning outcomes could solve the problem of versatility required in the context of varied educational provision.

TOOLS AND INSTRUMENTS

Strategic tools and instruments described in the strategy plan framework include:

1. Structural cooperation between industry, education, and national administrations.
2. Using reliable methods and systems to recurrently analyse skills needs over time.
3. Recognition of new skills and qualifications according to European Skills, Competences and Occupations (ESCO) classification.

4. Creating a sustainable blueprint of sectoral cooperation.
5. Creating a VET toolkit for transversal skills provision.

The existing guiding principles of the European Union's educational framework can be used as an instrument for transferability. The use of appropriate tools leads to the appropriate structure of the designed educational packages, enabling further updates in the (near) future.

MONITORING MECHANISM

An essential part of the action plan is the creation of a mechanism to monitor future gaps. The Blueprint Maritime Shipping Portal (Deliverable 3.6) of the project will provide a tool to serve this purpose. The Blueprint Maritime Shipping Portal aims to serve as the 'main' hub of educational resources developed mainly in Work Package 2 of this project but also for future educational development packages. Among other elements, the Maritime Shipping Portal will provide a toolbox for designing new educational content in an easily-retrievable method involving user-oriented tools. The portal approach in SkillSea will enable an easily-searchable and dynamically-expandable digital maritime education library. The virtual visitor will have access to the digital content through the web, being able to instantly find and retrieve digital maritime educational material from distinct sources. SkillSea will provide access to the portal to all European MET providing institutions and other academic education and training providers related to the maritime sector and the relevant stakeholders.

STRATEGY FRAMEWORK

The scheme shown below in figure 1, outlines the outset of the strategy, which will further be fine-tuned in the final delivery of Work Package 3.7.

The assessing stage will involve regular meetings with all stakeholders to identify future skills and competencies needed, as well as trends concerning employability, attraction and retention. The policy directions can also be assessed. Best practices can be shared, and the outcomes of evaluation of the impact of previously developed (educational) tools, transferability and mobility can be discussed. The assessment phase will, in effect, serve to repeat the current gap analysis undertaken by Work Package 1 of the SkillSea project to ensure that developing trends are identified and addressed in Work Package 2.

The assessment will lead to the formulation of common goals, set with a timeframe of middle or long-term for the necessary (learning) outcomes.

The educational packages or tools based on the (learning) outcomes will be developed by consortium members using, among others, the tools set out in the current SkillSea deliverables of Work Packages 2 and 3.

The developed tools, educational packages and the assessment will be placed on the Maritime and Shipping Portal to scale the work, at least, to the members of the consortium.

The strategy provides a continuous programme, to be used after the SkillSea project, to facilitate maritime professionals with the necessary skills and competences, to enhance their mobility and the transferable value of their knowledge and expertise.

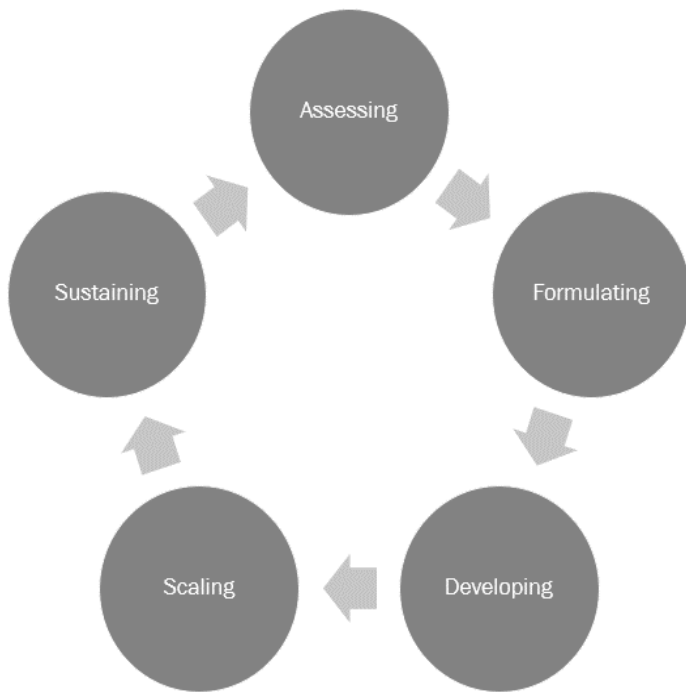


Figure 1: Strategy framework scheme

5. BEYOND SKILLSEA: SUSTAINING THE ALLIANCE

Creating sustainable governance for assessing needs and anticipating future gaps, as well as for monitoring progress and evolution of skills, will provide the stakeholder alliance with a dynamic prospect even amidst heightened uncertainty. The proposed portal for sharing best practices and for feedback on the effectiveness of SkillSea solutions also will be a useful mechanism for strengthening stakeholder cooperation.

Resilience at times of transformation of the wider professional environment can be enhanced with a combination of knowledge and skills. Change management of employers, employees and MET providing institutes will become an overriding prerequisite for both keeping maritime professionals abreast of change and for enabling increased mobility. SkillSea provides an opportunity to view the sustainable connection of skills, tradition, experience and technology, combined with new knowledge provided through an updatable and flexible set of skills, as a system not only for attraction and retention but also for adaptation and mobility of maritime professionals across the sector and beyond.



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