

DeSeCo Country Contribution Process (CCP)

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This document provides background information on the current status of the work in the OECD Program *Definition and Selection of Competencies: Theoretical and Conceptual Foundations* (DeSeCo) and on a new activity, the Country Contribution Process (CCP).

1. Overview of the DeSeCo Program

In the framework of the OECD Education Indicators Project (INES), the Swiss Federal Statistical Office, with support from the National Center for Education Statistics, United States Department of Education, launched the OECD Program *Definition and Selection of Competencies: Theoretical and Conceptual Foundations (DeSeCo)* in 1998.

Objectives

The main objectives of DeSeCo are:

- **To provide normative, theoretical, and conceptual foundations for defining and selecting key competencies.** The program seeks through an interdisciplinary scientific approach, within an international context, to develop a common, overarching theoretical framework for the identification of the competencies needed for individuals to lead an overall successful and responsible life and for society to face the challenges of the present and the future.
- **To develop reference points for the development and understanding of future indicators of competencies and for the validation of education indicators, and to provide a basis for more accurate and appropriate interpretation of empirical results.** For this it is crucial to enhance an iterative process between conceptual and empirical work through close linkages to INES activities in the domain of competencies.
- **To respond, eventually, to information needs of policymakers.** The DeSeCo Program is embedded in the long-term strategy of INES to develop a broad basis for international comparisons of education outcomes and to develop relevant and theoretically based criteria for the successful evaluation of education systems and learning outcomes more generally.

Important considerations implied by the DeSeCo Program are: a broad scope defining key competencies as encompassing participation not only in the labor market, but in the different arenas of a modern democratic society; the assumption that it is possible to identify a limited number of extremely relevant competencies that go beyond the subject-bound curriculum provided by schools; the existence of different scientific and conceptual approaches to the definition of competencies; and the need to negotiate and balance priorities linked to the selection of key competencies (which will be applied in the work place, in social relations, in democratic processes, etc.) among policymakers.

DeSeCo's research questions

The problems and issues that the DeSeCo Program addresses are described through the following set of research questions:

- What do the notions of competence, key competencies, skills, etc. mean? How can these terms be clearly conceptualized and described?
- What ideas about the nature of human beings and society should serve as a starting point for the definition of competencies and the selection of key competencies? What are the underlying normative criteria?
- How can the perspectives of different academic disciplines contribute to the understanding and construction of a set of competencies that are considered indispensable for individuals to lead a successful and responsible life and for a democratic society to face the challenges of a changing and often conflictual world?
- To what extent is it possible to identify key competencies independent of culture, age, gender, status, professional activity, etc.?
- Which competencies are necessary for acting in different fields of life—including economic, political, social and family domains, etc.?
- To what degree do competencies operate independently or as an interdependent set? How do they relate to each other?
- What are the theoretical foundations and the rationale behind the selection processes of key competencies? What are the political, social, and economic factors that influence the definition and selection processes of key competencies in different socioeconomic and cultural environments, and how is this influence exercised?
- Is there a significant amount of overlapping between sets of key competencies across different environments? Recognizing the heterogeneity of scientific approaches and processes, to what extent should that heterogeneity be taken into account?
- What is the relevance of the emerging ideas on key competencies to policymakers, including the development and interpretation of indicators designed to reflect competencies among the population? How could these issues be addressed and developed by future research? What are potential approaches towards operationalizing the competencies
- What is the role of social institutions in transferring competencies to the population?

Main activities: 1998–Fall 2000

So far, four main activities of the DeSeCo Program have taken place. The first was an analysis of past indicator-related projects in the domain of competencies within the OECD context—the Cross-curricular Competencies Project (CCC), the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS), and the Human Capital Indicators Project. The second was an examination of existing theoretical and conceptual approaches to the concept of ‘competence.’ The third was the identification and definition of theoretically based sets of relevant competencies from a number of disciplinary perspectives: anthropology, psychology, economics, sociology and philosophy. The fourth activity was a symposium organized in Neuchâtel (Switzerland), October 13–15, 1999, with about 60 participants. The symposium brought together the authors of scholarly papers representing the different disciplinary perspectives, other scholars, and representatives of leading social and economic institutions to discuss the issues raised by the work done until then in the program. At the center of this discussion was the question of how competencies and key competencies could be defined and identified.

Following the symposium, the conceptual work continued through the development of a paper laying out DeSeCo's thoughts on a number of theoretical and conceptual issues and delineating common features among the proposed approaches to defining and selecting competencies. This paper is a chapter in the compendium for the 4th General Assembly of the OECD Indicators of National Education Systems (INES) Program held on September 11–13, 2000.

Interim main findings

The ongoing discussion among experts on possible conceptual approaches to the topic has shown both the power and challenges of an interdisciplinary dialogue on the topic. Some conclusions are:

- The term 'competence' cannot be grounded on a coherent set of theories coming from the social sciences (mainly psychology) but—as with the term intelligence—it is altogether useful when describing individuals or social groups and subsequently needed when comparing the outcomes of education.
- A competency is the ability to meet a demand of a high degree of complexity. Competencies encompass not only knowledge and skills but also strategies and routines needed to apply knowledge and skills, as well as appropriate emotions and attitudes and the effective self-regulation of these components.
- Competencies do not exist once and forever. They are learnable throughout life, including adulthood, but they may also disappear when not used. They are only partially provided by schools and the formal curriculum of educational institutions.
- Within the DeSeCo Program key competencies are provisionally defined by three conceptual elements. Key competencies assume a mental autonomy that involves an active and reflective approach to life; they are multifunctional, meaning that they are needed to meet different important demands and to solve multiple problems; and they are transversal across social fields. Three generic key competencies have been identified, namely acting autonomously and reflectively, using tools interactively, and joining and functioning in socially heterogeneous groups.
- There isn't now and will never be an exhaustive, definitive, and universally valid list of key competencies. But there is a sufficient commonality among different disciplinary approaches and proposed competencies from different societal fields for identifying a sound set of key competencies.

For an in-depth discussion on the main findings of the DeSeCo Program to date, see the contribution prepared for the Compendium publication for the INES General Assembly 2000 (see Rychen & Salganik, 2000, listed in the DeSeCo Sources).

2. Country Contribution Process (CCP)

A central issue of the DeSeCo Program is that the definition and selection of key competencies is largely a process of negotiation among various stakeholders. National input into the process is the next step if a country-wide consensus concerning key competencies is to be reached. Such a consensus is a prerequisite if resources are to be committed downstream to assessments based on the DeSeCo conclusions. As a result, the success of DeSeCo will critically depend on the active engagement of as many countries as possible in the activities.

Countries should be interested in participating in the Country Contribution Process (CCP), as in the long run DeSeCo is not simply an academic operation, but is embedded in the development strategies of the overall OECD/INES Program for the next decade. DeSeCo aims to lay a foundation for choosing important and rewarding directions for the development and interpretation of future indicators of key competencies. Such a foundation cannot be validly constructed without taking account of the social and educational policy perspective.

The CCP is an opportunity for countries to reflect on national initiatives identifying and measuring key competencies in an international context. Furthermore, through this activity links between national initiatives and the international development of indicators will be enhanced.

Objectives of the CCP

The main objectives of the CCP are:

- to provide information on national efforts to define key or core competencies as intended outcomes of the education system or as the basis for the assessment of competencies;
- to identify, in the national context, the competencies that are considered most relevant to success in important areas of life (e.g. business and the labour market, in political and civic spheres and in family life) and to build a consensus around those competencies particularly relevant in an international comparative perspective;
- to understand how key competencies are embedded in national skill development and evaluation strategies and how these are negotiated among the different national stakeholders (e.g. public authorities, enterprise sector, scientific community and media);
- to obtain national views on the relevance of the DeSeCo project and its interim conclusions to date, particularly its conceptualisation of three generic key competencies as acting autonomously and reflectively, using tools interactively, and joining and functioning in socially heterogeneous groups; and
- to provide views on the assessment of core competencies, nationally and internationally, together with details of any national experience in assessing key competencies.

Vital to the reflection on main issues raised by DeSeCo will be linking the work of DeSeCo to national experiences in the definition and selection of skills, knowledge, and competencies, especially when developing indicators of educational outcomes relevant to the society and economy. It is expected that comparing national contexts and looking for elements that have

a cross-national relevance, thus combining national and international perspectives, can lead to a better understanding of the overall context and ultimate relevance of the work conducted under the program. It would provide new and creative inputs to the ongoing discussion.

The activities and results of the CCP—enabling policymakers, administrators, business representatives, and educators in different countries to participate in the DeSeCo Program—will support and facilitate the selection of relevant sets of key competencies in the civic, social, economic, and cultural areas.

Procedure and Tasks

Two options are offered for participation, one involving a workshop and written comments, the other involving preparation of a summary report.

Option A—Workshop

- In each participating country, a national coordinator—in cooperation with the DeSeCo CCP Coordinator—will be responsible for organizing the CCP activity. The national coordinator will invite a group of key players representing different arenas (policy, business, civil society, education, etc.) to participate in the CCP by attending a one-day workshop and providing input during and after it. At the workshop, selected main findings and issues of DeSeCo will be briefly presented. Based on the guiding questions (see below), the participants will make introductory statements about their own experiences and perspectives related to defining and selecting key competencies. A discussion will follow on how key competencies are negotiated, defined, and selected in various sectors and in national contexts.
- Drawing on the participants in the workshop, 4–6 individuals—each representing a specific arena—will be asked to each provide, a short written statement (approx. 5 pages) covering some or all of the questions that were considered relevant at the workshop (for more details see Annex A). They will do so in consultation with persons of their choice, and in accordance with a schedule agreed to during the planning of the workshop. These statements will be used in conjunction with the workshop minutes by the DeSeCo CCP Coordinator in drafting a country summary report. This report will be revised by the DeSeCo CCP Coordinator based on feedback provided by the national coordinator.

For more detailed information about the intended roles of the DeSeCo CCP Coordinator and the national coordinator, see Annex B.

Option B—Summary Report

With this option, a written report will be produced without holding a formal workshop. It is assumed that the INES National Coordinator would take the initiative and coordinate the production of the report or arrange for someone else to be responsible for this task. The country report should provide answers from a national perspective to the guiding questions (see below). It is suggested that national stakeholders representing different arenas (policy, business, civil society, education, etc.) be consulted in order to comment on the topic from different perspectives. This report will be compiled in a volume to become available for the 2nd international DeSeCo Symposium (March 2002).

For both options, individuals identified as participants in the CCP should be familiar with the types of issues raised by the DeSeCo project, though they do not have to work directly in the field of educational measurement or be familiar with the OECD and INES context. Their expertise could involve skills and competencies, the effects of technological and social change on individuals and society, social policy, the labor market, or any other topic related to the issues raised by the DeSeCo Program.

The DeSeCo CCP-Coordinator will produce a synthesis of the results of the entire CCP, which will be presented at the 2nd International DeSeCo Symposium.

Guiding Questions

Set 1: Which Key Competencies?

- Which competencies (or sets of competencies) have been identified or discussed as necessary for individuals to cope with important demands and challenges in particular social arenas (such as the political and civic sphere, business and labor, family) or for a successful life in general? Please focus on developments in the sector you work in.
- Are some of the key competencies identified/discussed specifically related to different periods in life and age groups or are they universally applicable? Which ones? Please explain.
- Are some of the key competencies identified/discussed considered to be specifically important in your country as compared with other countries? Which ones? Why?
- What is the rationale, in your national and professional context, for identifying and selecting key competencies that would match present and future needs in society and the economy?
- To what extent do the identified/discussed key competencies correspond to DeSeCo's three generic key competencies¹?

Set 2: Assessment, Indicators and Benchmarking

- When measuring educational and training outcomes and evaluating the meaning of learning outcome indicators in your country, are overarching key competencies considered important? If yes, which ones?
- Could you relate qualification standards and assessment practices in the business world (e.g. hiring and evaluating employees) and other social fields to key competencies? If so, which ones? How?
- When participating in international comparative studies on student outcomes and life skills, are there indications in your country of an increased interest in key competencies by policymakers? Are there competency areas in which it would seem especially important for your country to be benchmarked against others?

Set 3: Public Debate: Negotiating and Legitimizing

- In the last decade, has there been a public and/or professional debate in your country on key competencies in different arenas and social fields (politics, civil society, economics, business, labor, mass media and communication, education)? What are the

¹ See DeSeCo's contribution included in The INES Compendium (4th INES General Assembly). The contribution is downloadable at www.deseco.admin.ch (Downloadable documents – Project Documentation)

main topics being addressed? What is the relationship between education and key competencies? Has the debate spanned different arenas and social fields?

- Would you see, in the field you are coming from, relatively consensual or controversial positions regarding the definition and selection of key competencies? Could you describe the most influential positions? Who are the main actors and stakeholders? Given your professional background and expertise, which position would you take? Could you put forward your arguments?
- Are there mechanisms in place to define, negotiate, and select ‘what really matters’ in terms of key competencies? Are these negotiating procedures and decision-making processes on the agenda of educational, social, or economic policies?
- Would you see a sufficiently legitimate basis for establishing priorities of indispensable key competencies in your national and professional context? If yes, which ones? If no, why not?

Set 4: Key Competencies and Education

- Is the definition and selection of key competencies an issue in your country when discussing, for example, goal-setting and the curriculum of the educational system, training at the work place, or life-long learning strategies? What prospects are envisaged? What are the expectations?
- Which institutions and/or agencies are responsible for the training of key competencies, within and without the formal education system? What role(s) do schools play in the teaching of key competencies?
- How could overall policy-making in different sectors, including but not limited to the education sector, promote the teaching and learning of key competencies?

Set 5: Assessing and Developing DeSeCo

- Do you know of any concrete initiatives resembling the DeSeCo Program in your country (research, developmental work in education, especially work related to outcome measurement and indicators, skill lists in the economic sector, policy initiatives coming from civil society, etc.)? Please name and describe them briefly.
- What are, in your view, the highlights and critical issues in the main findings² of DeSeCo so far? Do you consider these findings relevant in your national context? How? In any specific contexts?
- How would you relate the DeSeCo Program and, theoretically, the expected results to your own academic, social, economic, or political context?
- Does your country have any proposals for contributions to advance the work in this area?

Products

1. CCP country reports
2. Synthesis report prepared by the DeSeCo CCP-Coordinator
3. Final report(following the 2nd International DeSeCo Symposium) summarizing the work of the DeSeCO Program and the consensus views of participating countries

² See DeSeCo’s contribution included in The INES Compendium (4th INES General Assembly), various expert DeSeCo reports. All relevant documents are downloadable at www.deseco.admin.ch.

Costs

The costs for national participation, including the conduct of national consultations, organization of a workshop, preparation of a national report, and participation in the International Symposium are assumed to be at the expense of the respective countries. The work of the DeSeCo CCP Coordinator, including his expenses associated with conducting the country workshop, will be paid by the DeSeCo Management.

Documentation

Inputs to the CCP are as follows:

- This CCP background note
- Pre-workshop information (if applicable)
- The DeSeCo contribution to the Compendium Publication of the 4th OECD/INES General Assembly
- Original expert papers (on request or downloadable at www.deseco.admin.ch)

Time Schedule

December 2000	Invitation to countries
January 25, 2001	Statement of interest in participating
January 2000–May 2001	CCP activities held
June 29, 2001	CCP Country reports finalized
Mid-December, 2001	Synthesis report distributed to participating countries
Mid-February, 2002	International DeSeCo Symposium
April 17, 2002	consideration of recommendations on next steps in the joint meeting of the OECD Education Committee and the CERI Governing Board

3. DeSeCo Sources (for further reading)

- Swiss Federal Statistical Office (1999), *Definition and Selection of Competencies: Theoretical and Conceptual Foundations (DeSeCo), Background Paper, 2nd revision*, Neuchâtel.
- Laura H. Salganik, Dominique S. Rychen et al. (1999), *Projects on Competencies in the OECD Context: Analysis of Theoretical and Conceptual Foundations*, SFSO, OECD, ESSI, Neuchâtel.
- Franz E. Weinert (1999), *Concepts of Competence*, DeSeCo Expert Report. Swiss Federal Statistical Office. Neuchâtel. (downloadable at www.deseco.admin.ch)
- Monique Canto-Sperber and Jean-Pierre Dupuy, (1999), *Competencies for the Good Life and the Good Society, A Philosophical Perspective*, DeSeCo Expert Report. Swiss Federal Statistical Office. Neuchâtel.
- Jack Goody (1999), *Education and Competences, An Anthropological Perspective*, DeSeCo Expert Report. Swiss Federal Statistical Office. Neuchâtel.
- Helen Haste (1999), *Competencies Psychological Realities, A Psychological Perspective*, DeSeCo Expert Report. Swiss Federal Statistical Office. Neuchâtel.
- Frank Levy and Richard J. Murnane (1999), *Are There Key Competencies Critical to Economic Success?, An Economics Perspective*, DeSeCo Expert Report. Swiss Federal Statistical Office. Neuchâtel.
- Philippe Perrenoud (1999), *The Key to Social Fields: Essay on the Competencies of an Autonomous Actor, A Sociological Perspective*, DeSeCo Expert Report. Swiss Federal Statistical Office. Neuchâtel.
- Various Authors (1999), *Comments on the DeSeCo Expert Opinions*. Swiss Federal Statistical Office. Neuchâtel
- Dominique S. Rychen and Laura H. Salganik (2000), *Definition and Selection of Key Competencies*, in Fourth General Assembly of the OECD Education Indicators Programme, The INES Compendium, Contributions from the INES Networks and Working Groups, p. 61-73. OECD. Paris

All contributions and reports are downloadable at www.deseco.admin.ch. The publication *Projects on Competencies in the OECD Context: Analysis of Theoretical and Conceptual Foundations* (1999) can be ordered free from the DeSeCo Secretariat (see Contact Address).

Note: DeSeCo documents can be cited as expert reports from the Swiss Federal Statistical Office, as shown in the example below:

Helen Haste (1999), *Competencies; Psychological Realities, A Psychological Perspective*, Deseco Expert Report. Swiss Federal Statistical Office, Neuchâtel.

4. Contact Address

Any questions or comments on the Country Contribution Process can be addressed either to:

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ANNEX A

Follow-up Statements to the CCP Workshop

Objective

The papers to be delivered after the CCP workshop by various participants provide an occasion to further elaborate on the topics discussed at the workshop and serve as a substantive input to the writing of a CCP Country report.

Focus

In light of the relevant interests, experiences, and perspectives of the authors, the statements should address some or all of the sets of the 'CCP Guiding Questions': (1) Which Key Competencies, (2) Assessment, Indicators and Benchmarking, (3) Public Debate: Negotiating and Legitimizing, (4) Key Competencies and Education and (5) Assessing and Developing DeSeCo.

A particular emphasis in each statement should be on defining and selecting key competencies that are relevant to the expertise/area of work being represented. In addition, the statement should contain an appreciation of which key competencies should be benchmarked nationally and internationally.

It is desirable that the statements should include as much relevant mainstream thinking as possible while also reflecting the personal viewpoints of the authors.

The statements should contain references to relevant projects, activities, and documents. They should not exceed five pages and should be sent to the national coordinator (address below) within the timeline set at the workshop.

ANNEX B

DeSeCo CCP Workshop - Responsibilities

DeSeCo CCP Coordinator

- Serve as a resource of information for the national coordinator concerning DeSeCo and the CCP, as appropriate.
- Provide a generic workshop agenda, and work with the national coordinator to finalize the agenda for country use.
- Provide CCP materials for national coordinator to distribute to participants (in particular an abridged CCP Background Note and the DeSeCo contribution to the 4th OECD/INES General Assembly)
- provide an introduction about DeSeCo, including program objectives, main findings, and objectives of the CCP and present the guiding questions at the occasion of the workshop
- Prepare the country summary report, and revise based on comments from the national coordinator

National Coordinator

- Select and invite participants
- Distribute CCP materials to participants (e.g., finalized agenda, abridged CCP Background Note, the DeSeCo contribution to the 4th OECD/INES General Assembly) and provide logistical information about the workshop to participants.
- Review workshop agenda and assist in finalizing details of the schedule
- Coordinate workshop logistics, amenities, and the distribution of relevant materials (e.g., nametags, food and drinks, audio-visual equipment as might be needed, handouts)
- Provide support to the DeSeCo CCP Coordinator in facilitating the workshop (e.g., offer welcoming and concluding remarks; summary by the rapporteur who could be the national coordinator)
- Take minutes of the meeting and produce a summary of them that will be sent to the workshop participants and used by the DeSeCo CCP Coordinator in preparing the country summary report
- Follow up with participants to obtain written statements that will be used by the DeSeCo CCP Coordinator in preparing the country summary report
- Review and provide feedback to the DeSeCo CCP Coordinator on the country summary report