FORESIGHT IN BRIEF
WHAT IS FORESIGHT?

Foresight is a tool which supports the design and implementation of policies with a medium to long-term perspective. By helping to anticipate and understand future developments in a policy area or sector or the system as a whole, foresight supports the exploration and development of more future-proofed, robust policies. By engaging in foresight, policy actors and relevant stakeholders explore the future and use these insights in deciding on the direction of current policies.

Foresight is distinctive due to a set of core elements and approaches:

- **Systematic** – in the sense that it involves a well-designed approach based on a number of phases and using appropriate tools
- **Participatory** – since it brings together a wide range of stakeholders and encourages interactions, networking and learning
- **Future intelligence gathering** – studying trends and drivers, their interactions and possible disruptions thereby allowing more evidence-based policy approaches and a level of anticipation
- **Vision-building** – exploration of alternative scenarios facilitates eventual focus on a common vision and consensus-building
- **Shaping decision-making** – foresight empowers the participants to move beyond exploration to actually shape the future through more proactive thinking
- **Mobilising action** – by engaging stakeholders it supports the pathway to effective policy implementation through joined up approaches

Foresight includes a range of forward-looking activities but it is not about prediction or merely about forecasting. It is primarily about sense-making (making sense of emerging trends and drivers), exploring alternative futures, and shaping and enabling a desired future.

WHY FORESIGHT?

At the strategic level, foresight can be used as a policy tool for priority-setting in identifying key policies to be implemented, key areas of national priority to be targeted and how to target investments in education and research and innovation more effectively.

Foresight is typically used to enhance competitiveness by:

- playing a corrective role (addressing weaknesses, gaps and failures in the system and/or policy lock-ins), or
- a disruptive role (encouraging an emphasis on wild cards, crisis or breakthrough events which can completely change the current status quo) and
- a creative role (stimulating the conditions whereby new networks and structures can evolve and grow).

In practice, a mix of these roles often comes into play with sponsors, stakeholders and the implementing team, pulling the foresight in different directions ideally until a shared understanding of the issues, perspectives and way forward is reached.
**HOW FORESIGHT?**

Foresight provides a methodology and mix of qualitative and quantitative tools which are adapted to address a range of foresight goals and objectives, including:

- making an overall strategic review and direction of a national/regional/sectorial system;
- identifying priorities for innovation actions, again at multiple levels;
- building common visions between actors and/or stakeholders who may not be used to working together;
- making decisions more robust through exploration of scenarios or drawing in wider expertise;
- increasing the likelihood of consensus by engaging a wider range of stakeholders through participatory elements.

The tools can be structured to reflect:

- their function: interaction, creativity, evidence and expertise
- phases of the foresight activity: starting with scanning, trends and drivers analysis, scenario development, visioning and roadmapping.

**HOW ARE THE FORESIGHT WORKSHOPS CONCEIVED?**

The development of the foresight exercise in Frame is conceived around three main workshops, which allow to analyse main challenges for HRD, to identify main trends and drivers influencing the demand for skills and to finally come up with a shared vision for skills development among key stakeholders, linked to priorities and a roadmap for implementation.

The first event brings all the major stakeholders together, presents the challenges (drawing on the inventory and gap analysis and need for a sector-wide approach), confirms the need to address them and the role of foresight in developing this approach, and shows that there are alternative/viable ways forward. The issues are identified through the inventory and preliminary gap analysis work, which entails a short review of the relevant strategies. The teaming event is the venue for introducing the participants to a deeper reflection on the key issues relating to skills with a view to confirming if these issues are the right ones or if others need to be added or given priority. The teaming event is aimed at bringing all the key players on board and engaged in the foresight exercise.

The second workshop focuses on the elaboration of a deeper analysis of future skills demand and supply: this is a significant departure from methods based on simple extrapolation based statistics as it makes space for serious discussion on discontinuities, paradigm shifts or game changers, as well as the demands that these will place on existing institutional arrangements. The Trends and Drivers analysis based on STEEPV (i.e. analysis of micro and macro shaping forces that influence HRD) also identifies key trend breaks and mostly aims at producing a shared understanding on macro trends and drivers and trend breaks impacting on skills up to 2020, at developing parallel scenarios and at getting shared agreement on aspects of the system requiring change.

Finally, the third workshop is devoted to the development of a Vision/Success Scenario, Roadmap and Action Plan for skills. By this stage, stakeholders have started to converge on a shared view of what the skills system looks like, how rapidly future skill needs change, what impact this will have on the actors of the system and their need to evolve in anticipation of change. The issues and conclusions identified previously are presented to the participants and they are invited to envision the kind of skills system which is needed in 2020. This is followed by a road mapping exercise which shows the major steps/actions required to move from the current situation to where they want to be in 2020.