

Position paper

September 2016 (draft)



WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF CHAIN5?

CHAIN5 supports building bridges and establishing pathways for students, employees and other learners at level 4, 5 and 6 through a focus on learning outcomes, rather than input based measures.

Using this approach, it will be possible to replace more traditional national tertiary education and training systems or underlying historical structures by introducing flexible and fluid processes that facilitate the portability and transferability of learning, thereby meeting the needs of students, employees and labour markets.

Chain 5 is particularly focused on the role of level 5 qualifications in these aims and utilizes experiences in Europe and other parts of the world, and the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF).

CHAIN5 Mission

The mission of CHAIN5 is to increase the quantity, quality and visibility of EQF level 5 qualifications across all European Union countries and to build bridges between national regulatory agencies, associations and institutions involved in EQF levels 4-5-6.

CHAIN5 Vision

CHAIN5's vision is to be:

- The forum for the exchange of best practices for EQF level 5 qualifications at the national and EU levels;
- The preferred platform for employer's representative groups and education providers to discuss shared interests and developments;
- Viewed across Europe as the expert community for level 5 qualifications with a repository of accessible knowledge and expertise.

The subject expertise will include:

- Professional and technical education pedagogy
- Professional and technical education curriculum
- Assessment methods
- Work-based learning
- Employer Engagement
- Validation and awards
- National PHE and HVET systems
- Bridge-building between SCHE, HVET, similar qualifications and the systems involved, like the European Higher Education Area
- Relations between informal, non-formal and formal qualifications and the possibilities to shape flexible learning pathways.

BRIDGE BUILDING

For that purpose, it is important to consider level 5 qualifications and programmes - including formal qualifications such as Short Cycle Higher Education (Higher National Diplomas and Associate degrees) and programmes of varying lengths presently titled Higher Vocational Education and Training - as part of a range of learning awards leading to employment or progression.

This approach will stimulate - via frameworks, standards and guidelines developed for European systems - the necessary transparency, leading to the development of recognition, fair credit transfer, real competence assessment and quality assurance across academic, professional, vocational and training sectors.

CHAIN5 will work on improving the alignment of education and training to the needs of labour markets and public organisations through better involvement of the world of work, sector representatives and other networks.

Level 5 qualifications should be organised in such a way as to improve the balance between personal development and the working life - and as qualifications in their own right.

Cooperation between universities, colleges, vocational schools, training providers and other locations where skills and competences are acquired has to be improved with regard to the design and implementation of curricula at all levels. This must be part of modern requirements, especially for level 5, in combination with levels 4 and 6.

CHAIN5 KEY MESSAGES

- We recommend greater emphasis on learning outcomes and employability in education and training systems at all levels that would facilitate the transparency and recognition of qualifications, enhance quality and foster mobility and social mobility in Europe.
- Rather than seeking to create new concepts and initiatives, looking at 'skills and qualifications', the focus should be on the appropriate implementation and, where necessary, adaptation of the existing EU tools for recognition and quality assurance.
- More needs to be done to develop synergies between the existing EU level and transfer tools for the transparency and recognition of qualifications that are achieved through vocational education and training (VET) including higher vocational education (HVET), professional HE (PHE) and higher education (HE) pathways.
- There is a growing need for more flexibility in offering learning pathways, combining formal and non-formal learning, and also in locations where work and study can be combined. This means that a national strategy on lifelong learning needs to include the structured involvement of the world of work.
- Level 5 qualifications can be an important element in such a strategy, maintaining strong links relevant to the labour market, and providing the opportunity for bridging educational sectors.
- Social mobility - the chance for anyone prepared to work hard to get on and achieve - depends on a flexible tertiary education system rewarding learning in many locations and facilitating progress and achievement across sectors.

CHAIN5 BENEFITS

Level 5 in Europe is a continuum of qualifications often unconnected- ranging from short courses to 4-semester SCHE including diplomas such as those offered by colleges and PHE institutions and applied academies, using formal structures or in some cases various types of non-formal or work-based education, for example advanced apprenticeships

CHAIN5 is also looking at this continuum for more flexible pathways with flexible exit careers meeting the needs of less structured labour markets.

The focus thus is not only on HVET and PHE and HE, but also on ‘private’ presently non-credit bearing courses and non-degree programmes.

A:

CHAIN 5 aims to study, publish and disseminate experiences and expertise concerning qualifications at level 5 of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). Level 5 qualifications play an important role in providing access to employment and career advancement, as well as enabling further learning and progression to higher education.

This double function - access and careers and progression through EQF levels - makes level 5 qualifications attractive to learners and employers.

B:

Some European countries use qualifications at EQF level 5 differently, and it is important to understand this and seek to establish common and meaningful pathways in and out of level 5.

Just as important they must be developed in response to increased needs for advanced technical and/or management skills in a rapidly changing labour market and an ageing workforce.

C:

The data proves that EQF level 5 qualifications are especially attractive to students with vocational education and training (VET or HVET) backgrounds and those already in employment. They contribute to lifelong learning by being accessible and attractive for adults and non-traditional learners and guarantee social mobility.

D:

An important aspect is that they are seen as valuable and relevant by employers, as most include some form of work-based learning. The development of comprehensive NQFs - including qualifications at all levels and of all types - in most European countries will shed new light on the potential of EQF level 5 qualifications.

E:

By acting as a valuable bridge between education and training institutions and subsystems, these qualifications support permeability allowing learners to move more easily between different types and sectors of education: academic, professional and vocational at different levels. Permeability will be valuable to the

labour market and at the same time produce a valuable intake for Universities, Colleges and other institutions offering qualifications at level 6 and higher.

F:

EQF level 5 is increasingly being used as a platform for developing new types of formal qualifications, whether initial (IVET) or higher vocational education (HVET), continuing vocational education and training (CVET) qualifications or short-cycle higher education (SCHE) qualifications.

CHAIN5 aims to encourage policy discussion on the types, purposes and potential of those qualifications in contributing to and addressing current and future policy challenges.

G:

The sharing of best practices for fair and proper relevance of qualifications for the rapidly changing labour market and helping people change or progress in their career will open doors for competence development if validation systems are handled correctly and fairly across the EU.

H:

CHAIN5 will draft and publish reports on the challenges for the creation of seamless systems which are beneficial to all stakeholders involved.

I:

CHAIN5 will seek to identify funding for projects involving level 5 partners in the network.

J:

CHAIN5 will draft Focus Papers pinpointing problems arising from students moving from level 4 to 5 and from 5 to 6.

K:

CHAIN5 will describe best practices for cooperation between high school institutions and colleges or universities and look into level 4 discrepancies in national systems.

HOW TO CREATE BRIDGES IN FORMAL SYSTEMS - EQF-5

Formal national education and training systems have distinct and traditional subsystems – general, vocational/technical and higher education (academic and professional) – which are in most countries organised and regulated separately.

Usually they are related to one another in a hierarchical manner. EQF level 5 can operate across these subsystems, with a heterogeneous mix of formal qualifications awarded by a wide range of VET and higher education institutions.

There are different qualification types to be identified at level 5. Studies have shown that about half of them are regulated by higher education or delivered under the responsibility of higher education institutions. Most are awarded as SCHE Short Cycle Higher Education programmes.

When focusing on the learning outcomes of these qualifications, the distinctions between VET and HVET, PHE and higher education is not always clear-cut and needs more attention at the EU level and also at the national level.

LABOUR MARKET RELEVANCE

Most EQF level 5 qualifications in formal national systems, such as HVET and SCHE are clearly linked to occupations/professions. This is also the case for most of the professional qualifications awarded within the higher education sector. This means level 5 qualifications not only are considered as an intermediate step towards a qualification at level 6, like the Bachelor's degree, but also as independent qualifications with distinct professional profiles and labour market relevance.

In countries where currently no formal qualification is linked to level 5, we identify this as an important gap. Newly developed qualifications sometimes compete with a range of others, gaining employer trust and university recognition may take time.

CHALLENGES

Several Member States have received country specific recommendations through the European Semester to improve the quality and labour market relevance of their VET and HVET systems.

At the same time VET systems and provision vary considerably across the EU. Member States are also at different starting points regarding quality assurance in VET and HVET with some more advanced than others.

Social mobility in Europe has not been convincingly improved by access to education alone. We need to create more opportunities for youths to move from VET to HVET and HE without the present sectoral obstacles.

Qualifications at skilled worker level are placed at level 4 in most countries; by contrast some countries place them at level 3. The same differences occur at the levels of higher VET qualifications. For example, the 'master craftsman' qualification is at level 6 in some countries.

High school leaving certificate levels are not always level 4 – this inconsistency has to be analysed and addressed.

It will be necessary to systematically analyse specific similar qualifications in order to identify inconsistencies between countries and to allow for possible adjustments in the respective NQFs.

Special attention needs to put on the planned EQF portal, which intends to link the different national qualification databases.

There will be a need to create a better link between 'instruments' like EQF, EQAVET, ECVET, ESCO and CHAIN5 as a community of (best) practice.

