

## Call for members for two Thematic Teams



1. European Strategy and Level 5
2. Platform for national and regional Level 5 networks

### **Background of this call**

Some time ago we sent you information about the structure we use for CHAIN5 as an international community of practice for level 5 qualifications. The emphasis is on exchanging experiences with those who are involved in offering them on a daily basis. This can take place within a whole spectrum of institutes, in higher education, higher VET (Vocational-Professional Education), business education and training, and all kinds of other providers.

### *At the grassroot level...*

We also focus on those who are engaged in providing education, training and programs in daily practice. These are practitioners, teachers, experts who are involved in practical projects, quality assurance staff members, programme coordinators, and in this way those programmes have a varied group of people who are placing level 5 more and more in the spotlight, given all target groups.

### *Networks at regional and national levels...*

In addition, attention for providing programmes at level 5 can also be found in regional and national networks for providers thereof. This situation leads to discussions about developments that affect the institutes, linked to their management and taking into account what happens in the collaboration with other stakeholders: government, politicians, employer organizations, social partners, student organizations, etc.

This is also done in conjunction with other networks in a region or country and with educational umbrella organizations such as those for higher education, vocational education and training, private education and professional bodies.

### *European cooperation on strategy and policy...*

Because many countries also take into account what is being devised and initiated at European level, there is also cooperation between organisations and associations involved in this. This may involve the approach to Erasmus+, conducting research and further related actions, organizing international meetings with a range of working groups, having funds to stimulate all kinds of developments and - certainly important - promoting expertise in all countries around instruments that can strengthen international cooperation.

Good examples of this are the associations that have themselves united in the platform called VET4EU2, being involved in VET and HE. But the Bologna Process is also a strong example of how a lot can be achieved internationally.

## **Call for two thematic teams under CHAIN5**

Next to the thematic teams we already have at the moment, we want to set up two specific teams based on the developments that are occurring and that strongly affect what can and must be done at level 5 (see also the annex for examples of recent documents about those developments).

In doing so, we call you to determine whether membership in one of these teams suits you. But if you know other experts among your colleagues within your network or organization who could make very welcome contributions to CHAIN5, then go ahead and let those people know about this call!

### **1. Platform for national and regional level 5 networks**

This is a team for representatives of regional and national networks and platforms, involved in level 5 issues and developments.

Under the banner of CHAIN5, the team will regularly exchange ideas through online meetings, about opportunities to discuss experiences on issues that are at play in several countries. This can be done by examining what else is going on in Europe and how this should be dealt with in the national or regional context. Conversely, such a network can ask the board of the team to propose topics to discuss with each other, in order to be able to use experiences in other countries.

This can also lead to webinars on the more general themes around the national situation of what is happening at level 5. A physical seminar can also be organized for a specific theme in a country that would like to initiate certain national developments on the basis of the results.

### **2. European Strategy and Level 5**

It concerns a team for members of CHAIN5 who are involved in international developments around level 5, who have contacts with organizations within their own region or country, and on that basis are willing to participate in discussions about what is going on at European level.

This group is said to be a 'think tank' of CHAIN5 when it comes to contributing to discussions, gatherings, meetings and conferences at the European level. This can be done by being present there or by reading the accompanying documents and giving advice based on that. This also includes looking at the results of studies conducted on level 5 and themes related to them.

In consultation with the board of CHAIN5, it is examined which members of this team are involved in a particular activity and, where appropriate, participate in an activity. This can also be done by making a contribution, with a presentation or by giving a workshop.

## **Conditions**

As included in the structure of CHAIN5, contributions to our community are made based on your own activities and position. The time spent on this is therefore not reimbursed by CHAIN5 (and therefore we do not charge any fee for the membership). This means that participating in a thematic team can take place within your own time.

For the team for the "European Strategy and Level 5" it has been agreed that for participating on behalf of CHAIN5 in certain activities, the costs that are not reimbursed through your own organization, will be borne by the board of CHAIN5.

It may also be that there is an invitation to participate in an activity where the costs are paid by the organization. In that case, also individual agreements will be made about for this.

## **How to apply for a team**

Interested? In that case, send an email with your details to [daale@chain5.net](mailto:daale@chain5.net) and indicate which team you opt for. You will then receive a confirmation and further information about the next steps we will take.

## **First contact (digital) and the Annual Conference**

The intention is to organize a first digital meeting for each team in the second half of January to discuss the further approach and to make agreements about the division of roles within the team.

In addition, during the annual conference of CHAIN5, on March 11, there will be a session about both teams, for their members and anyone who wants to know more about what the goals are.

Below you will find a number of passages from three recently published documents.

It concerns 1) recommendations made by the European Commission for the use of VET for a number of issues relating to the economy and society, 2) a declaration signed at the end of November by all ministers responsible for VET, which contains recommendations for the next five years, and 3) a document relating to the formation in the coming years of the European Education Area.

Those passages deal, directly or indirectly, with the role of qualifications that can be placed at level 5. They are also examples of issues that can be discussed in both teams, viewed from various angles, also in view of the importance for the networks at national or regional level.

It also shows that many documents are emerging for review, commentary and subsequent consideration of the possible consequences for the "European Level 5 Area".

All three documents can be found at: <https://www.chain5.net/newsletter/>

### **1 COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION of 24 November 2020 on vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience**

(15) The present Recommendation aims at fulfilling the objective of the European Education Area to develop a genuine European learning space where high quality and inclusive education and training is not hampered by borders and which aims at removing obstacles for recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and learning periods abroad, and work towards the smoother cross-border validation of training and lifelong learning outcomes.

8. Centres of Vocational Excellence act as catalysts for local business investment, supporting recovery, green and digital transitions, European and regional innovation and smart specialisation strategies, development of vocational education and training, including at higher qualification levels (EQF levels 5-8) in line with national context and provide innovative services such as clusters and business incubators for start-ups and technology innovation for SMEs, as well as innovative reskilling solutions for workers at risk of redundancy.

10. Initial and continuing vocational education and training are part of the lifelong learning. Flexible and permeable pathways are in place between both initial and continuing vocational education and training, general education and higher education;

11. Vocational education and training programmes at EQF levels 5 to 8 are further developed to support a growing need for higher vocational skills in line with national context;

### **2 Osnabruck Declaration**

We are currently witnessing an increase in labour market needs for a different mix of skills and qualifications as well as structural changes in the VET landscape. Both developments call for modernised, inclusive VET. Since individuals will have to regularly reskill and upskill to adapt to rapidly evolving digitalisation<sup>5</sup>, VET excellence at all qualification levels including higher EQF levels will become ever more relevant to maintaining employability. Excellent VET prepares learners for the world of work of today and for the future, enabling job creation in the context of effective and quality labour markets. Excellent VET contributes to strengthening democratic citizenship and European values. Achieving these goals will require developing the capacities of VET institutions with active involvement from stakeholders. High-quality VET that includes entrepreneurial education empowers learners to open new businesses.

The role and scope of VET institutions are changing. Boundaries between higher education (HE) and VET are blurring; obstacles are still to be overcome, while policies are striving for greater permeability in education and training systems. Excellent VET is valued in societies and links with recognition and permeability to HE as well as with smooth access to the labour market.

Develop and strengthen centres of vocational excellence as innovative incubators and skills ecosystems encompassing learning, training and research activities, VET, HE and research in selected sectors or socio-economic challenges, including support for entrepreneurship and digital and innovative VET resources for all

Support Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) and improve permeability between vocational and academic pathways, including work-based learning and enhanced cooperation between VET, HE and research centres, thus establishing quality and effective VET and apprenticeship programmes at EQF level 5 and above

### **3 COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION - on achieving the European Education Area by 2025**

This Communication presents a reinforced approach to ensure the achievement of a European Education Area by 2025. The European Education Area ties in with Next Generation EU and the long-term budget of the European Union for 2021-2027.

In setting the stage and taking the necessary measures for recovery and resilience, people-centred policies are more vital than ever. Early childhood education and care, schools, vocational education and training (VET), higher education, research, adult education, as well as non-formal learning have a key role to play. Such policies need to develop a holistic approach to education and training and recognise its intrinsic value providing an all-round grounding to ensure the fullest contribution to and participation in society.

Tertiary educational attainment of young adults had a massive expansion over the past decade, bringing the EU even beyond the 40% target set in 2009. Higher educational attainment correlates with better chances to find and maintain work, higher earnings, and greater participation in democratic life.

To turn the tide, in the European Education Area:

- Educational attainment and achievement should be decoupled from social, economic and cultural status, to ensure that education and training systems boost the abilities of every individual and enable upward social mobility. Early childhood education and care play a critical role in this regard<sup>18</sup>. It is also important to cater for the educational needs of pupils with high learning potential in an inclusive way.
- Education systems at all levels should comply with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
- VET systems, which can support young people to manage their entry to a changing labour market and ensure that adults participate in programmes tailored to the twin green and digital transitions, should be more agile, resilient and future-proof, in line with the Commission proposal for a Council Recommendation on VET.
- Robust and inclusive lifelong learning strategies should allow those who have left early to re-enter education, and those who need it should be able to access higher education and VET programmes to acquire or update skills that the jobs of tomorrow require, also for older age.
- Cross-border cooperation should be strengthened, in youth work, as well as in the domains of sport and culture, to promote non-formal learning including their link to formal education.

Higher education and VET systems need to adapt to strengthen their key role in supporting lifelong learning and reaching out to a more diverse student body. This requires a thorough change in mindset, culture and structure. The Commission will work with Member States towards this objective, and plans to provide support with the Erasmus programme and other EU funds and instruments. In addition, as set out in the Skills Agenda, the Commission will work towards the development of a **European Approach to micro-credentials**, to help widen learning opportunities and strengthen the role of higher education and vocational education and training institutions in lifelong learning by providing more flexible and modular learning opportunities.

They are useful not only for professionals, but can also complement the curriculum for students at Bachelor, Master and Doctoral levels. A growing number of adults, with or without a higher education degree, will need to reskill and upskill through more flexible alternatives than a full degree

in order to overcome the gap between the learning outcomes of their initial formal qualifications and emerging skills needs in the labour market.

The need for more flexible and inclusive learning paths has increased as the student population is becoming more diverse and the learning needs more dynamic. While a growing number of higher education institutions, including European Universities, are already working on the development of these micro-credentials, a common definition and a common approach on their validation and recognition is lacking.

In this context, as announced in the Skills Agenda, the Commission plans to present a proposal for a **Council Recommendation** in **2021**. The purpose of the recommendation would be that European actions will support building trust in micro-credentials across Europe and aims at having all the necessary steps in place by 2025 for their wider use, portability and recognition.