



Exploring the Challenges of Permeability: EQF-5 and Higher Levels (Higher Education and Higher VET)

9 –10 December 2019, MCAST, MALTA



Including an idea for having a 'new' scheme for tertiary education

OUTCOMES & RECOMMENDATIONS

In general

The conference was organized by CHAIN5 in collaboration with EfVET and MCAST, given a common interest in a number of themes and subjects. To draw more attention to them and to hear the opinion of our members and other experts, this conference was held on the Main Campus of MCAST in Malta. More than 80 participants took part in the discussions.

Similar to other European countries, there is a clear need in Malta to clarify the position of EQF level 5 education and training, and other types of qualifications, and the role of institutions in the VET sector – also looking at the involvement of Higher Education Institutions.

The Minister for Education and Employment in Malta has indicated that certain outcomes of the conference can contribute to the government's policy with regard to the positioning of courses at level 5 and higher, to be seen as Higher VET – or to use, as proposed during the conference, the name Vocational-Professional Education (VPE).

The main aim of the conference was therefore linked to the search for a transparent system, to be used for all possible qualifications at level 5 and higher. This concerns tertiary education to which qualifications in higher education belong, in line with VET or programs within the private sector for, so-called, Business Training, Personal Development and other non-formal training.

On the basis of such a transparent, internationally recognizable system, each provider can indicate where the qualifications that are offered, can be positioned. A system like this can always be much more detailed, but the level, the orientation and the status of the provider are already criteria that make such a positioning possible.

Subsequently, a student or another learner can see which pathway within the system can lead to a qualification elsewhere, at an equal or a higher level. The providers involved in this can indicate which options exist for students taking up that route. Sometimes it is about individual solutions, but the intention is to have more agreements, memoranda of understanding and bilateral processes and procedures to optimize the most common learning pathways.

More tools and instruments are needed, such as recognition of prior learning, the use of credits, the coordination of quality processes, the valuation of other qualifications, the flexibility of programs, and the use of work-based learning. The development and mainstreaming of such processes is costly, time consuming and resource-intensive to achieve the best instruments in the most optimal way. For level 5, and then specifically VET-5, (and higher) it is possible that incentives for this may be possible after the awareness raised during the conference in question. A plan of action is necessary to be filled in further in 2020 and 2021 at subsequent meetings.

Continuation

Based on the discussions and sessions during the Malta conference, and a number of associated proposals, it is clear that a process around level 5 and VET must be carefully initiated.

Many parties are involved, with their own strategy for the future. Also, many stakeholders are not waiting for complete changes in a national system, based on international agreements. Many discussions at all levels are needed to see how, also in consultation with national governments, reinforces a national system can take place, in favor of all types of learners.

Several initiatives are ongoing in various Member States and at the European level too, with its own dynamics. The policy and strategy for the three main sectors in the present system are in the hands of different organizations, networks and platforms, with their own interests. Therefore, within an initiated process it will also have to be investigated whether it is possible to bring those parties and other stakeholders together on a shared basis.

New meetings about this theme and related topics

In Malta, the first exploration has been for the use of a national qualification system to integrate also levels 5 and higher. The national qualification system was introduced in 2009 and has necessitated a number of adjustments based on this.

A system for a design of Higher VET (VPE) at 5 and higher for institutions is needed for the formulation of instruments. Such an instrument must be useful to the daily work within institutions. The relevance for the labor market and for students must also be clear, with clarity about the position of various qualifications and study programs.

Therefore, the proposal is to discuss at the upcoming CHAIN5 conference in March 2020 who wants to participate in a thematic team for this process. Then, in contact with EfVET and possibly other stakeholders, organize a joint thematic team.

It is being recommended that at the next EfVET conference, a workshop can be held to give an overview of the first results of the work by this team. Possibly there can be a meeting for the team before this conference to prepare the workshop.

In the Spring of 2021, a high-level conference can be considered in consultation with the Ministry of Education in Portugal, knowing that this country will have the Presidency of the European Council during that period. The aim is to discuss the state of play for level 5 in Europe, and permeability between Higher Education and VET.

The model – a transparent scheme for the EQF levels 5 and higher

During the conference a scheme (system, schedule, structure) was presented for the qualifications at levels 5 and higher of the European Qualifications Framework. Partly use was made of the memos published prior to the conference.

The main reason for this presentation and the proposal for such a scheme is that in the Member States and in Europe there is a very differentiated offer of qualifications across the entire spectrum of level 5, both in terms of programs and providers.

The proposal is an attempt to make the whole system more transparent and structured for the users of education and training, formal and non-formal.

On the basis of this, learners can look into the possibilities of using their particular qualifications to continue their study at the same or a higher level.

Providers of certain qualifications can then determine the value (the level) of a previously obtained qualification by looking at its position in the scheme. In combination with its provider and the agreements made with such an institution or organization - or can be made - it is then possible for learners (students, workers, job seekers) to continue their study at a higher level elsewhere. That can be done in a national but also international setting.

The scheme can be a reference for national governments to look at their own education system. Since every country has its own educational history in different educational sectors, it is not

expected that education systems have to be adapted. This proposed scheme can design learning pathways and identify cooperation between providers in different educational 'columns'.

At an international level, the governments and Ministries for Education responsible for levels 5 and higher, can consider, as, whether this proposed form of harmonization is feasible. For higher education, there is the Bologna Process (EHEA), while for the parallel systems less attention has been paid to join forces to achieve a powerful positioning of the corresponding qualifications.

Recommendations

With regard to the proposed scheme (in which tertiary education and the associated qualifications can be included), the following comments were made during the conference or were provided in the reports thereafter:

- The model is a good starting point in itself, for further discussion and to take with us as CHAIN5 and EfVET in subsequent conferences.
- The name 'Business and Personal Training' may sound strange to countries where English is spoken. The recommendation is to change this name.
- The schedule can cause confusion if someone is not already familiar with the situation. The proposal is to cut the diagram into two parts, one for formal and another for non-formal education.
- If we are looking at non-formal education which is offered by HEIs, especially when it comes to securing the level and quality of it, it is also necessary to look at it by organizations or bodies related to the government.
- This also means that there must be room for qualifications that are considered as 'higher education' in a country, while these programs do not (fully) meet the requirements for the European Higher Education Area. Perhaps it can be a 'category' in its own perspective.

IDEA
**FOR A GENERAL STRUCTURE FOR FORMAL AND NON-FORMAL
EDUCATION AND TRAINING
AT LEVELS 5 AND HIGHER OF THE EQF (TERTIARY SECTOR)**
as an international reference

Formal education

EQF	HE (EHEA) Higher Education Academic / Professional	VPE Vocational-Professional Education	Sector
8	Third Cycle (Doctorate)	VPE-8	Tertiary
7	Second Cycle (Master)	VPE-7	
6	First Cycle (Bachelor)	VPE-6	
5	Short Cycle (Associate)	VPE-5	

Non-Formal education

EQF	BTE Business Training and Education			Sector
	Training Non-Formal Offered by HEIs	Training Non-Formal Offered by 'other (private) institutions' and 'Business Academies'	Training Non-Formal Offered by VPE Colleges	
8				Tertiary
7				
6				
5				

More outcomes

Based on the workshops, sessions and the plenary discussions, a list is provided here with some further conclusions and recommendations to the organizations involved. During the next annual conference of CHAIN5, several themes can be discussed and also viewed for having a follow-up.

It is important to be aware of the fact that CHAIN5 is a real international community of practice, so it focuses primarily on practical situations around level 5, useful for teachers, practitioners, coordinators and managers of the study programs and providers involved.

The collaboration with EfVET makes it possible to 'translate' all good practices and experiences that are gained into opportunities for considering at the national and international level, if it is about how improvements and updates can be made for offering level 5 qualifications (see the scheme). This primarily requires all kinds of actions to create room for national, regional and local innovations.

Using practical themes for CHAIN5

CHAIN5 is a good and useful community for practitioners from the field. The members are less involved in 'policy making'. And it also determines the expectations – sharing good practices and having discussions about them. Also combining practical issues and strategy at a national level is very difficult, with different roles.

Identity of level 5 in general

As a Community of Practice for the 'European Level 5 Area' it is important to have a good picture of the entire spectrum of qualifications. If we start from the presented scheme for level 5 and higher, it involves a number of domains (sectors, 'columns'):

- Higher education, including SCHE, with a suggested general international common name: Associate, within the European Higher Education Area (Bologna Process).
- VPE, also called Higher VET, with VPE-5. There is no general international name for this. In the process that can be started for the VPE sector to achieve a 'European VPE Area' with its own characteristics, it is important to make the recognizability of level for VPE-5 clear to the target groups and stakeholders.
- Business Training and Education, BTE, to be seen as a (very) wide range of non-formal qualifications and programs, provided by all kinds of institutions. This concerns Business Academies, Private Institutions and other organizations that focus on tailor-made training courses for the labor market. This may also concern parts (departments) of higher education institutions for offering VET / VPE, and that can be a specific situation, with the need of a separate approach.

Identity of level 5 as a whole

When it comes to the 'identity' of level 5 as a whole, the following general statements can be made. This list can be used for further discussions about the whole spectrum of level 5 qualifications, also looking at specific similarities and differences for the tree columns: HE, BTE and VPE:

- Level 5 is defined by its close relationship with the world of work
- Level 5 reflects in work-based learning as specific of study curricula, higher level of independency and management skills EQF level 5 students
- Level 5 has to enable deeper learning and more possibilities on reflecting. It also has to enable some level of specialization per extension to level 4
- Students have in most cases a more VET background, entrance is often possible with a 'trade-or journeyman's certificate'
- There are many grownups among the students and therefore work-based learning could be a main feature of a Level 5 qualification.
- In several circumstances, the programme combines study with work
- There is a strong link to the world of work – a requirement for starting and providing education at this level
- Level 6 is more research based, level 5 is more practical oriented - adapted to the world of work, companies and the industry

- Study programmes may also be initiated by the industry
- There are flexible programmes – also by using online learning
- Level 5 gives the possibility for progression to studies at level 6, in some cases through the use of RPL.
- It is possible to start a study programme in another sector, based on agreements between the institutions involved.

Proposed activities, for practical issues

Some suggested next steps:

- Identify more activities to support recognition and engagement of the world of work in development on level 5 in order to straighten the cooperation with companies, employers and their networks
- Identify specific certificates on level 5, to find out how recognition can be used to ease the graduate/staff mobility within the EU
- Define, where necessary, a more detailed typology of different level 5 qualifications
- Find a way to test the proposed model (scheme) in different countries
- Organise events with different stakeholders relevant to level 5, to look at the relevance of the scheme – and how it can be in favour of them – and how
- Make clear what the best descriptors are for learning outcomes at level 5.

Practical recommendations for more actions

Some practical recommendations to get level 5 further up in the discussions that are needed:

- Define what we are aiming for in such a discussion, having the practical use of the outcomes in mind
- Start a thematic working group, with concrete action points
- In the coming two years, organise meetings, for this working group, to agree on actions point, and what to do next
- Invite relevant stakeholders for this meetings, to give input for the actions, proposals and other activities – based on those action points
- Publish during the process short documents, showing the differences at national level – and the impact of ideas
- Use the meetings, conferences and newsletters for dissemination of good examples
- Cooperate with other organisations if they have the possibility to help us, and to feed the discussions with outcomes of projects and research (for instance: the comparable overview of level 5 in the different countries, as done by Cedefop).

Recommendations to CHAIN5 and EfVET

Concrete recommendations to CHAIN5 and EfVET, for ‘actions’:

- Start a joint Thematic Team on level 5 in VET and include in the ‘business plan’ for the next two years
- Use the proposed scheme and names for ‘tertiary education and training’ in meetings and conferences, for research
- Organise in 2020 and 2021 specific sessions, led by the Thematic Team, and invite other stakeholders (HE, World of Work, Academies, networks, platforms...)
- Organise in Spring 2021 an international conference, a high level meeting, in Portugal – using the network of the Maltese Ministry for Education and Employment
- Use the annual conferences for asking more attention for a ‘European VPE Area’ (the name to be seen as a ‘starting point for discussions’).