

PROPOSAL 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

EQF	HE (EHEA) Higher Education Academic / Professional Formal	BPT Business and Personal Training			VPE Vocational-Professional Education Formal	Sector
		Training Non-Formal	Training Non-Formal	Training Non-Formal		
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	
Vocational Education and Training / General Education / Others						Secondary

1. A general international name was chosen for **Short Cycle HE**, which could only be used by HEIs that offer formal education within the EHEA.
2. To make a clear distinction within the EHEA, the proposal is to give the name VPE for the sector that builds on the European VET sector in a formal sense. Therefore, combining the characteristics of being strongly professional and labor market-oriented. By linking the level to it, it is clear how the qualification has its position in the system.
3. All non-formal qualifications are covered under the Business and Personal Training. They are connected via a National Coordination Point to a level of the NQF and thus to the EQF. Three types can be distinguished: one for by institutes that are also allowed to offer HE, a second one which is the same but then by VET providers, and the third one by Business Academies and other private training providers, among others.
4. The separation between formal and non-formal education (education and training) is also important for the VPE sector, likewise for the HE. All qualifications that are considered as non-formal provided by HEIs are not covered by the EHEA.
5. This is categorical, not a blueprint for national systems. Hence, it is just a reference to give all qualifications a position at the European level, which could be recognizable in an international setting. Nevertheless, the national systems could use their names, degrees and titles. Even more, the use of names for national institutions offering VPE qualifications at the higher levels will be decided by them in the national context.
6. The proposed names (degrees, titles) to be used by organisations, institutions and other target groups in the international context will make clear where a qualification can be positioned.
7. The starting point is the level of the EQF. Next, it is important whether it is formal education (regulated by the government in a certain way) or non-formal education (regulated and guaranteed by other organisations).
8. This means that the status of the institution does not determine whether it is HE, VPE or BPT. An institution that offers both HE and VET, consist of two distinct providers. To give an example: If an HEI may also offer a VPE-5 qualification, the HEI must place it in a different entity.
9. As previously mentioned, the starting point should be always the EQF, and ultimately all qualifications (5, 6, 7 and 8) that are connected to this, and included within 'tertiary education'.

Acronyms:

EQF: European Qualifications Framework / HE: Higher Education / HEIs: Higher Education Institutions / EHEA: The European Higher Education Area / VPE: Vocational-Professional Education / NQF: National Qualifications Framework / BTP: Business and Personal Training

Malta Conference

Specific newsletters have been distributed about this event in the past period. It has led to more than 65 participants who will exchange ideas about developments in tertiary education, levels 5 and higher, the role of VPE (Higher VET) and the possibilities for achieving greater flexibility. Permeability between qualifications from various sub-sectors is of great importance, also when it comes to the involvement of the business community.

A spearhead is the position of Vocational and Professional Education (VPE) at the higher levels. These qualifications under the name 'Higher VET' do not yet have their own 'approach', with a distinctive set of instruments (as the European Higher Education Area does).

Various memos have been sent to the participants in recent weeks. This concerns the sub-themes that can be addressed in the workshops and sessions (plenary and in groups). Examples will be provided from Malta with regard to the situation for the learning paths that can be formed at the higher levels.

Below the short articles from the memos are listed for information purposes.

VPE (1)

One of the proposals within the system for levels 5 and higher, within tertiary education, is to look for a better name for the concept of Higher VET. For various reasons, HVET gives a wrong picture of what it means and for what it can be used within the total system. The role of formal education and the possibilities of non-formal education that is classified under training can thus be strengthened. In addition, the term 'higher' no longer needs to be compared to higher education, but can be much better linked to the level of the EQF and NQFs.

Name

A suitable name for this type of qualification that can be discussed is 'Vocational-Professional Education (VPE)', used inter alia in Switzerland. Of course there are more options and we would like to hear them from you in Malta. But this name combines a number of relevant aspects of the type of education - so that makes clear to the target groups what can be expected from the programmes. These are qualifications that build on what is offered by VET providers up to and including level 4. But at the same time they have a professional approach to guarantee competences having a relevant place in the programmes. The combination makes VPE a unique type of education.

An 'area' for VPE

There is a clear growth when it comes to the range of qualifications for VPE at level 5 and higher. This creates its own 'area', perhaps referred to as the 'European VPE Area'. There is an opportunity to discuss with the providers what the structure can be within VPE, what the common elements are and which instruments can be developed and shared, for quality assurance, monitoring of the level (and descriptors), transfer to higher levels and international cooperation.

Looking at the international context, during the coming period, can make such an EVPEA a powerful sector for cooperation with the other sectors at level 5 and higher. It can also be a major step towards greater flexibility in learning pathways. Students, workers, employers, they can all benefit from it. This strengthens the position of VPE providers.

Sufficient input for discussions in Malta. Various examples emerge in the workshops to support this endeavor.

HIGHER EDUCATION – AND TRAINING

We know Vocational Education and Training (VET) as a sector within the international qualifications system. For the levels up to and including 4 of the EQF, we have formal education (VE), and non-formal education that therefore is examined under the name of training (T). Combinations of these sub-sectors are offered in many countries, looking at the focus of VET. This means that there are units within formal training (for a recognized diploma) that are based on training courses linked to topics and developments that are relevant for the labour market. This is important for target groups involved, in order to make clear the link to the world of work and the way how to guarantee it.

Link to non-formal qualifications

For higher education in the international context, there is no sectoral link with 'training', i.e. with that type of non-formal education. That is why there is no mention of the sector HET.

Nevertheless, Higher Education Institutions and other providers of formal higher education can offer programmes of all types and sizes that fall under Business and Personal Training (see the system in the separate document, the box in which a cross (X) is stated). It is therefore about non-formal qualifications at the levels 5 and higher.

It may also be that the quality assurance is provided by external organizations such as professional bodies. But the qualifications have to be placed by their owners via a national coordination point (or a comparable agency or organisation) at the relevant level of the NQF (and therefore also the EQF). For clarity's sake, in the international context this is not about formal higher education, even though the providers are institutions that provide formal training within the 'Higher Education Area'.

International vs national

During the conference we will examine whether this approach offers enough possibilities for an international approach, given the transparency of the system. Of course, for the national system each country can make its own choice in a number of aspects. There may be organizations that can provide a qualification independently of the government and guarantee the level and quality. These qualifications may have been added by the government to 'the National Higher Education Area' in a specific way, but not necessarily being part of the Bologna Process, having its unique criteria in mind.

The discussion in Malta is emphatically about establishing an international system to guarantee the recognisability of a certain classification.

BUSINESS AND PERSONAL TRAINING (BPT)

In more and more countries it can be observed that qualifications that fall under 'non-formal education', will be recognised at a national level. To make their position clear to as many as possible target groups, they are then linked to a level of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and therefore also indirectly to the EQF. This is not always necessary... if the value of the qualification is linked to a company, a group of functions, a professional group - and can therefore be seen as a tailor-made programme for employees in a clear working environment. The level is then not always relevant, but it is about the content of the program and its quality - often guaranteed by an own or external organization.

For more flexibility...

The system, here presented as a proposal for having a greater transparency and which serves as the basis for various discussions and also workshops at the Malta conference, assumes that the procedure for linking a qualification to a level of the NQF has taken place. This allows an organization or institution that offers training in another sector to quickly determine whether a certain qualification can be used for a next step within the entire system.

This may include:

- Using the learning outcomes for a procedure for Recognition of Prior Learning
- Including such a non-formal qualification in a programme that leads to a formal diploma, as a way to offer students current competences and learning outcomes.

In any case, it means greater recognisability among all parties that offer qualifications at the tertiary level. The use of the exact 'level' increases the chance of acceptance of each other's offer throughout the entire system. The learners can therefore rely more on being able to organize more flexible learning pathways, without being refused by another provider of qualifications when it comes to being able to enter at an equal or higher level.

BPT offered by HEIs and VPE-Colleges

As can be seen in the system (also attached here), various sub-sectors can be mentioned under BPT. Institutions for HE and VPE may also be involved in offering qualifications within non-formal education, for instance by using a (private) 'Vocational Training Centre'. What then remains are the training programmes that are explicitly focused on personal development and the competencies that are needed to continue to function within a work environment. For this, (large) companies can

have their own Business Academy, but there are many (large and small) private institutions that provide a customized training at the request of employers.

If those qualifications are offered for a longer period, it is worthwhile to link them to the NQF. It can also be indicated that the owners can use the certificate (or diploma) in a better way if they opt for a formal diploma.

During the conference, the relationship between the qualifications that are explicitly linked to the business community will be discussed. Names are used for this such as: professional qualification, business training, but also: in-company training and course.

If they are linked to the NQF, to a level of the framework, these qualifications can also be used for a learning pathway that leads to other qualifications, also in HE and VPE. Having an eye for each other's offer thus leads to more transparency and mutual trust.

VPE (2)

This name VPE is an alternative, in the international context (national choices can always be made, of course), for Higher VET. The combination of 'Higher' and 'VET' can be confusing in certain circumstances and also suggests a kind of link to 'Higher Education'. The term VPE is used *inter alia* in Switzerland and – interestingly enough – in Hong Kong. Therefore that possibility mentioned in the scheme, to be discussed further in Malta during the workshops and sessions.

What is certainly an issue that needs to be examined is how further to shape the status of the VPE sector in the coming years, i.e. the qualifications at levels 5 and higher. For higher education, a lot of work has been done since 1999 on a set of instruments that have ensured that the underlying qualifications are recognizable in an international context, provided with a certain orientation and positioned in such a way that agreements can be made between countries. This has led to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) as an umbrella name for higher education qualifications - from the Short Cycle to the Doctorate.

Growth for the VPE sector

It is expected that the growth in the number of qualifications offered in the VPE sector will continue in the coming period. This is possible at all levels, 5 and higher. Then there is a clear need to 'communicate' with each other in a broad international setting. Not just for VPE between countries, but also with the HE and BPT sectors. This may involve continuous learning pathways, a start in another country with a certain qualification and/or getting accepted for a job elsewhere, followed by all sorts of additional training.

The question that we can try to answer during the conference is what tools are needed and then can be developed. It is obvious that we have to look at how that happens in the other sectors, in order to increase international recognition.

Characteristics VPE sector: to be developed

The workshops during the conference are primarily intended to see for which aspects of the design of a VPE sector relevant international instruments can be sought. On the one hand, they must be distinctive for VPE and on the other hand, offer the possibility of establishing a connection with the other two sectors in the system.

That is a major challenge. A process must start, with experts in this field. A form of coordination is needed, with the involvement of various European organizations. It is clear that level 5 can play an interesting role, partly in view of the connection with secondary education. In that way the input from CHAIN5 can be explained.

Briefly listed:

- We can explore the specific characteristics of the VPE sector.
- Based on this, it can be considered what tools are needed to give the VPE sector 'an international face' and also a sufficient status for all stakeholders.
- There is a need to identify the connections with the HE and PBT sectors and to see whether these instruments are adequate or whether additional options must be built in.

It is therefore up to the participants in the conference to consider whether such a process can be initiated based on the presentations, the workshops and the sessions, and how this can be done in the best way. Initiatives can be proposed, to be used by the organizations involved, together with all other international partners.

'THE WORLD OF WORK' AND THE EQF

The EQF is central to the schedule that we want to discuss during the conference, amongst other issues. The qualifications in the three sectors ('pillars of the system') are linked to the EQF in a certain way. This does not happen in a direct procedure. In a country there may be an NQF, a national framework. The levels of the NQF are 'translated' to the levels of the EQF.

But it is in Malta about the international approach, which is why the EQF is used in the system to make it clear at what level a (national) qualification can be positioned.

Questions: using the EQF

This naturally raises a few questions, partly in combination with the way in which the business world should be taken into account when setting up such a system. They can be discussed in Malta with each other and then to determine their 'answers'. Here those questions, with brief explanations.

1. The EQF is therefore required. Is that useful?

It seems that in various situations both the person (student, learner) and the organisation that must 'value' this person on the basis of the training, see the need to know at what level a qualification has been achieved. That must be able to be determined independently.

Of course the provider is also important, but it is so - to cite an extreme example - that if an University offers in the private setting a course about basic IT competences, this qualification can't be placed at a minimum level of 5. And it is therefore not automatically 'higher education'. That is why a generally recognized framework is certainly useful.

The question is therefore whether the use of the EQF as a starting point contributes to the transparency of the entire international system, across all sectors?

2. Does it mean that each country must have an NQF?

Because the EQF is included in the proposed system, it is indirectly assumed that a country has an NQF, compatible with the EQF. This allows qualifications to be compared with each other, and not only in the international context within the same sector. But that is also possible throughout the sectors.

It can in any case be noted that agreements are being made by various countries in Europe about the mutual recognition of qualifications. Especially in higher education, given the system that applies to it. But in time it may be possible for the entire system.

The question is therefore whether each country has an NQF operating in this way and, if not, what can be done to encourage it?

3. An important stakeholder of the entire system is the business world, the labour market, the world of work. Do employers consider the level of a qualification important and, in which situations, is that the case?

It can be said that ultimately every qualification plays a role in finding, retaining and developing a job, a profession. That is possible as an independent entrepreneur, but often there is an employment contract involved, being an employee. Someone who obtains a qualification within the system as outlined for the conference can indicate the level at which the training is completed. That is useful for a company, as a starting point.

But it is also about training people, employees and others who play a role in an organization or company. This is a different situation, derived from the position that is already being performed. The training is tailored to this.

The question is therefore whether, in addition to a relevant programme with the required competence, the employer is increasingly asking for an interpretation of the level and, if so, what is the reason for this?

4. Work-Based Learning is a format that is growing in importance. It requires combining learning and working, to be further established in the cooperation between the business community and educational institutions. Is the EQF also important for this, so is the level relevant?

There are various formats for WBL in which the formal programme includes business courses, small programmes and training courses offered by professional bodies and other employers' organisations. This means that in this way qualifications that fall under BPT have been given a place in a formal programme.

On the one hand, this is a possibility to include current competences in such a study programme, but on the other hand, it may also be important to demonstrate that the entire programme has the required level. In other words, combinations are made of qualifications from different sectors.

The question is whether this is a situation that fits in with collaboration between employers and educational institutions and, if so, what is the benefit for both partners?