

NEWSLETTER 2 – LEVEL 5 IN THE PICTURE

information, documents, research, reports...

Last month, we released the first newsletter, with information on developments, studies, networks and other issues related to level 5, in Europe but also in other parts of the world.

In connection with this, a call has been made for members we would like to have for two new thematic teams. One is for strategic developments at the European level and the second for matters that affect national affairs and lend themselves to the exchange of experiences. But of course they can be used back and forth for CHAIN5, to see which actions and activities are interesting.

These plans will be discussed during session 3 of the Annual Conference, on 11 March. This is partly done on the basis of two introductions to national systems, in Poland and Norway. An overview will also be given of current developments at the European level.

Registration for the conference is possible by going to www.chain5.net/activities/

In this newsletter, just like last month, we give a number of messages about what is happening around level 5, often with a link to the source – and just a few comments from our side.

After the Annual Conference, we will try to include a number of outcomes from sessions 3 and 5 in the March issue, given the presentations that will be held there. But of course we are welcome tips from your side, documents that have appeared and reports on national level 5 discussions.

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1 European Higher Education Area – Bologna Process – and Short Cycle HE

As is known, in 2018 during the periodic meeting of the European ministers responsible for higher education in their country and exchanging views on the Bologna Process, the Short Cycle Higher Education (SCHE) was formally included in the European Higher Education Area.

The website of the Bologna Process (www.ehea.info) now contains the following text:

SHORT CYCLE

A number of countries offer short cycle programmes which are practice-oriented and provide students with professional knowledge, skills and competences to facilitate entering the labour market. The European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning includes short cycle programmes at level 5.

In some countries these programmes may lead to an undergraduate programme, in others they may be part of it. In yet some other countries this type of programme does not belong to higher education at all.

Since the 2018 Paris Communiqué, however, short-cycle higher education qualifications can be included as stand-alone qualifications within the overarching framework of qualifications of the EHEA (QF-EHEA). Each country can decide whether and how to integrate short cycle qualifications within its own national framework (NQF).

It is certainly interesting to see that a distinction is made in this text between:

- Short Cycle qualifications, to be positioned at level 5 of the EQF
- Short Cycle Higher Education qualifications, part of the EHEA.

However, the first type is not described here as a Short Cycle in the right way, since in that context it is not known what the 'Long Cycle' is, to put it that way. In higher education, the SCHE is seen as 'linked to' or 'part of' the First Cycle, having Bachelor as common name. In a formal sense, this means that graduates can transfer from a SCHE program to a bachelor's programme, partly on the basis of the way in which the Dublin Descriptors have been drawn up for all cycles within the EHEA.

The first type is better to speak of Vocational-Professional Education 5¹, also now called Higher VET at level 5. This does more justice to this type of training, with the rights that can be derived from it. Being able to transfer to a level 6 qualification - and therefore also a bachelor's programme - is included as an option, with an arrangement between the institutions involved.

During the Annual Conference, this will be included in session 3, partly to make a proposal for adapting this text (and see also below for a starting point).

2 SCHE approach within the Bologna Process (EHEA) – incl. micro-credentials

Under a new secretariat for the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG), held now by Albania, there is a planning for the next years, talking about the EHEA and how the next 20 years of the Bologna Process can be helpful for all countries involved (48 of them).

Within the activities of the BFUG, all kinds of groups are working on various themes and there are also networks for experts in areas that are important for higher education in those 48 countries (with the government always having the final say on the design of the own education, and thus the National Higher Education Area).

One of these networks is the EHEA Network of National correspondents for qualifications frameworks, i.e. national experts who are responsible for the NQF or are explicitly involved in it.

We give a number of passages from the most recent document relating to the work for the coming year. Look at what is said about 'micro-credentials' and other small units, and how his network will discuss how they can be integrated in higher education.

The remarks about the SCHE and similar qualifications are 'coloured'.

Name of the Network

EHEA Network of National correspondents for qualifications frameworks

Flexible and open learning paths, part of the original inspiration for the Bologna Process, are important aspects of student-centered learning and are in increasing demand in our societies. In addition to full degree programmes, **many higher education institutions are offering or may offer smaller units of learning**, which enable learners to develop or update their cultural, professional, and transversal competences at various stages in their lives. We ask the BFUG to explore how and to what extent **these smaller, flexible units, including those leading to micro-credentials, can be defined, developed and implemented** by our institutions using EHEA tools.

The Network shall act as a forum for debate and advice on issues related to the QF-EHEA and national frameworks, in particular with a view to:

- ensuring coherence between national frameworks and the QF-EHEA; ensuring coherence between the QF-EHEA and the EQF;
- **advising on the development and implementation of ECTS-based short cycle qualifications as stand-alone higher education qualifications within the QF-EHEA in countries that wish to develop and implement which short cycle qualifications; advising on how and to what extent smaller, flexible units, including those leading to micro-credentials, can be defined, developed and implemented within the QF-EHEA and national qualification frameworks;**

¹ Another option is to use: Higher Vocational Education (HVE) – or combining the two: Higher Vocational-Professional Education (HVPE), avoiding that it will be seen as 'just' VET at the higher levels. And using A till D for the levels 5 till 8, knowing that every country has its own approach for using the NQF.

- encouraging periodic reviews of the implementation of national qualifications frameworks for higher education;
- encouraging and providing advice on renewed self-certification of national frameworks for which developments make this necessary or desirable;
- developing proposals for arrangements to strengthen the peer review of national self-certification reports and processes.
- encouraging reflection on how national qualifications frameworks can best help education systems fulfill all major purposes of higher education.

Working method

Annual meetings of the Network are organized with the participation, as far as possible, of representatives of all EHEA members and consultative members. The meetings will normally be held in September/October. Specific issues may also be addressed by electronic communication or online meetings.

Whenever relevant, joint activities with the EQF Advisory Group, Thematic Peer Groups, or national contact points may be organized.

The Network is coordinated by the Council of Europe, which brings the outcome of its work to the attention of the BFUG as well as the EQF Advisory Group

It is, and will be clear to everyone, that the activities of this network always look at the entire national framework. This means that it concerns all levels and the connections that are possible between the various educational sectors. The EHEA is one of those sectors, just like VET and the programmes within general education. There are also many non-formal qualifications that more and more should be given a place in a register that belongs to an NQF.

We will continue to monitor those developments. But if CHAIN5 members are experts on this topic, please let us know.

3 Two examples of developments concerning level 5: Austria and the UK

As you know, there is a lot to be found on the Internet about the education systems of countries. This provides interesting insights, including an overview of the latest developments. One link where a lot of information is provided is: <https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/> Look up your own country. And if something is not right, or has already been adjusted, especially when it comes to level 5, then we are recommended for that information.

We give here two examples of things that can absolutely be discussed within CHAIN5, we think, for a variety of reasons. In addition, here a number of passages from the internet, with some comments from our side.

3.1 Austria

In Austria there are no short-cycle higher education programmes but *short-cycle tertiary programmes*.

The workload of short-cycle VET programmes differs.

In the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) short-cycle programmes correspond to level 5.

Here you can clearly see what is happening in countries that do not have a formal place for the SCHE (see the text on the website of the EHEA, mentioned above). This means that the institutions for higher education that function within the agreements within the Bologna Process and therefore operate as such in a national context, do accept that qualifications are set up at level 5.

The compromise is that an 'umbrella' and common name is used for the (formal) qualifications at levels 5 to 8, namely Tertiary Education. This is fully in line with what has been proposed within CHAIN5, among other things during the conference in Malta, in December 2019 and later also in a report, for ordering the sectors in which education is provided.

In addition to the EHEA, this is the sector for Higher VET, but in countries that do not want SCHE in the formal context, an independent programme with a clear focus on the labour market is now often chosen, using the concept Short-Cycle (level 5) and that reference to the tertiary sector. It is therefore a 'derivative' of higher education, so positioned separately.

Within CHAIN5 we will start the discussion on the basis of this whether this can lead to independent providers, such as the Community Colleges in the USA, or whether it is better to see such qualifications as a variant within the sector for Vocational-Professional Education. Agreements can then be made about cooperation between the EHEA and the VPE sector (Higher VET).

3.2 UK

One country that has long been working with a package of EQF level 5 qualifications is the UK. There are various frameworks for and for a number of years also various organizations involved in control of the quality.

Here the most important passages from the article. You will find all kinds of links to websites and documents in it.

UK and level 5

Short-cycle higher education encompasses first cycle qualifications below the level of a bachelor's degree. In many respects, including the arrangements for student financial support, the same arrangements apply as for bachelor's degrees. Please therefore refer to the article 'Bachelor'. This article focuses on the ways in which short-cycle programmes are distinctive.

Branches of study

The most commonly followed short-cycle programmes are Level 5 qualifications in the Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies (FHEQ). These include foundation degrees, Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) and Diplomas of Higher Education (DipHE).

Foundation degrees

Foundation degrees are shorter than full bachelor's degrees. They are usually of two years' duration if studied full-time and cover a wide range of subjects, from engineering and computing to health and social care and early childhood studies. While they may provide the basis for a student to progress to studying for a further year and gain a bachelor's degree, foundation degrees are also standalone Level 5 qualifications. They are predominantly delivered through further education (FE) colleges.

Study methods for foundation degrees can be very flexible, which means that they are available to people already in work, those wishing to embark on a career change, and those who have recently completed qualifications such as A Level or apprenticeships. Typically, students have the opportunity to learn in the workplace as well as in the classroom.

All foundation degrees are expected to meet the generic statement of outcomes set out in the qualification descriptor for foundation degrees at Level 5 of the FHEQ. This describes broad expected outcomes in terms of what graduates should be able to demonstrate and the wider abilities that they would be expected to have developed.

Foundation degree awarding powers (FDAPs) are conferred separately from the power to award bachelor's degrees, as discussed in the article on 'Types of Higher Education Institutions'. The right to award foundation degrees is protected by law.

Foundation degrees were introduced in September 2001, with the aims of addressing the shortage of intermediate-level skills, widening participation in higher education, and stimulating lifelong learning. They are designed with a particular area of work in mind, and with the help of employers from that sector, and aim to equip students with the relevant knowledge and skills for business.

The other types of short-cycle qualifications described below are awarded by external awarding organisations.

Higher National Diplomas (HNDs)

Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) are vocational higher education qualifications designed to teach the skills required in a particular area of work. They are offered in further education colleges and higher education institutions (HEIs). HNDs are at Level 5 of the Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies (FHEQ) and typically take two years to complete full-time. These awards are not protected by law (that is, the power to award them is not regulated as it is for bachelor's or foundation degrees). The awarding body is Pearson, an awarding organisation

for academic and vocational qualifications across the UK, which operates Higher National Diplomas under the BTEC brand.

Diplomas of Higher Education (DipHE)

Diplomas of Higher Education (DipHE) are qualifications at Level 5 of the FHEQ, which may be professional, technical or academic in nature. They involve two years of full-time study, usually at a higher education institution (HEI), although some FE colleges also provide them. DipHE are available in subjects ranging from accounting to textile design. Like HNDs, they are also among the types of higher education award that are not generally protected by law and may be granted by an awarding organisation.

The UK thus recognizes the Foundation Degree as a form of what is understood by Short Cycle HE, formally offered by the Universities. But at Further Education Colleges they are also offered with a license from a partner university.

The Higher National Diploma has also been around for a long time. You could see it as a form of VPE / HVET, given its content and form. The accreditation body is now held by Pearson, an international company, also active in other countries with similar qualifications. This may also be discussed in sessions 3 and 5 of the Annual Conference.

4 Osnabruck Declaration and Higher VET

In a previous newsletter we paid attention to the so-called Osnabruck Declaration, adopted by the European ministers involved in VET, and published at the beginning of December last year. We give again the part of it that is about the Higher VET and its stimulation.

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 digitalisation⁵, 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.

We thus support an initiative for VET excellence in Europe and emphasise the relevance of VET programmes at EQF levels 5 to 8 on a par with HE in order to offer VET graduates a flexible, inclusive and valuable path to high-level jobs and career opportunities in response to current and future socio-economic needs. We consider well-targeted quality investments in VET and enhanced cooperation with and among social partners and relevant stakeholders including learners crucial.

5 Overview of NQF Developments in Europe 2020 – An analysis can be done...

Cedefop's concise guide to national qualifications framework developments in 38 European countries (27 EU Member States as well as Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Kosovo, Montenegro, Norway, Serbia, Switzerland and Turkey) in 2020.

This guide can be downloaded here:

<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/8611?src=email&freq=weekly>

This document contains a lot of information about the NQFs. It can be used, we think, to have a survey later this year to find out what is happening at level 5 in those countries.

There will be a call after the Annual Conference for this, under the new Thematic Group for national issues.