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**"Specialist education" or "short-cycle studies"?**  
**On the way to place qualifications at the 5th level**  
**in the Polish higher education system**

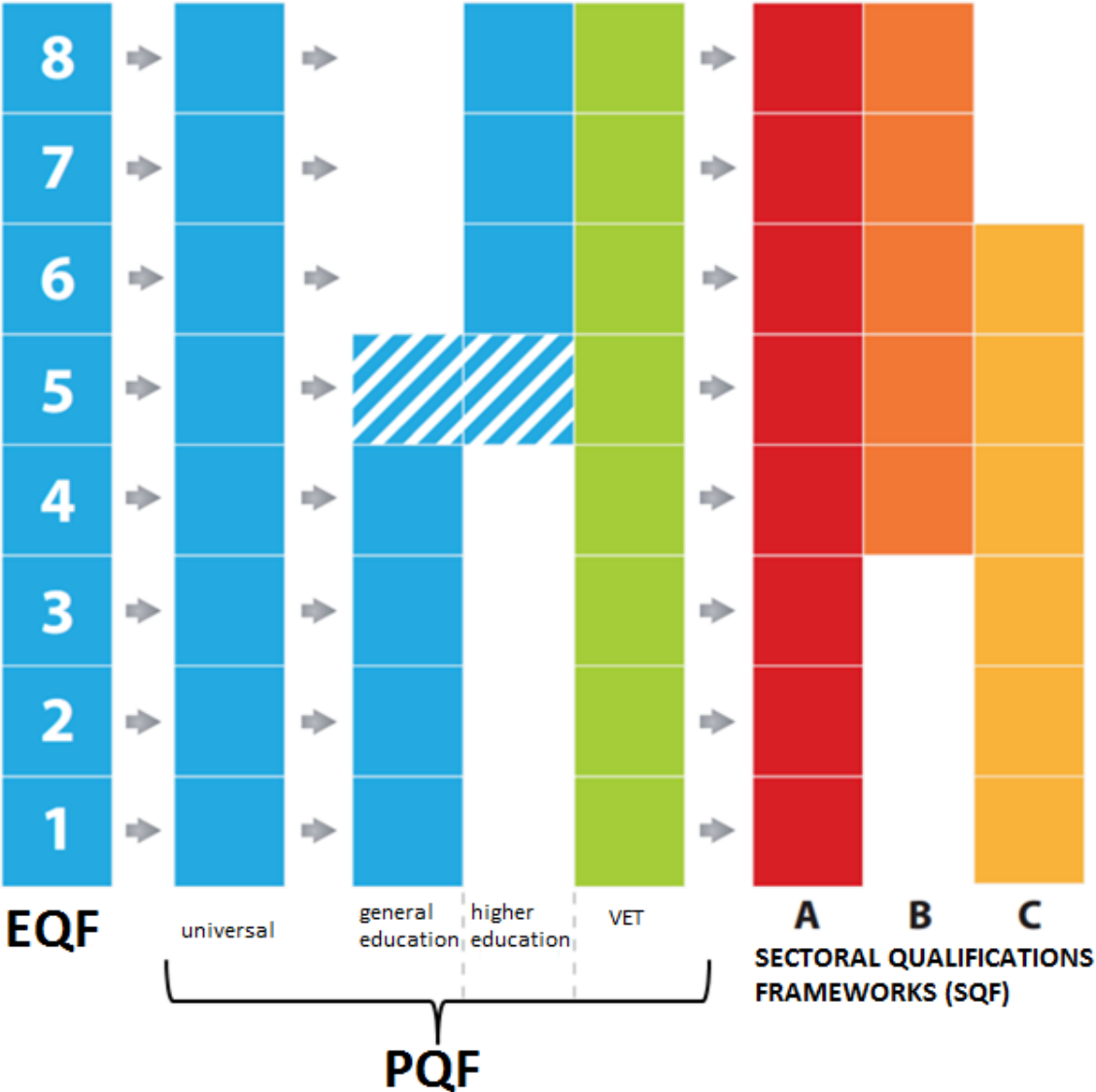
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# 5th level PQF – “The missing link”



2013-2020

The 5th level research project

*Is it justified and is it possible to introduce study programs at the 5th level to the Polish HE?*

The overall goal of the activities undertaken until 2017 was to gather arguments for and against the introduction of level 5 programs into the higher education system and create a project of related legal solutions

2013-2020

## The 5th level research project (2)

Initiators and promoters:

- The Polish Rectors Foundation,
- Pearson Central Europe.

Stakeholders involved:

- representatives of HE institutions (both vocational and academic),
- representatives of employers' organizations,
- representatives of student organizations,
- Ministry of Science and Higher Education,
- The Conference of Rectors of Academic Schools in Poland (CRASP),
- Main Council of Science and Higher Education
- The Polish Accreditation Committee (PKA)

2013-2020

The 5th level research project  
(3)

### **Stage I: 2013 – 2014**

- Legitimacy and feasibility of introducing study programs at the 5th level in HE
  - Literature research
  - Empirical research

### **Stage II: 2015**

- Draft study programs at the 5th level in HE

2013-2020

The 5th level research project  
(4)

### **Stage III: 2016-2017**

- Analysis of practical aspects related to the organization of the education process for the previously designed 5th level programs (recruitment rules, RPL, links between level 4 and 6, recognition of learning outcomes towards level 6, etc.)

### **Stage IV: 2019-2020**

- Obtaining opinions of the academic community on the solutions provided by the Law on Higher Education and Science (adopted in 2018) regarding programs at the 5th level

## Conditions for the successful implementation of level 5 programs (2017)\*

- Legal status similar to studies at the 6th and 7th levels
- Financing method - as above
- The programs introduction of quality assurance?
- Monitoring of labour market needs
- Pilot programs supported by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education
- Dialogue with academic community
- Information campaigns
- Title of the 5th level study diploma: „specjalista dyplomowany“

\* Report No. 3, Commission for Strategic Problems of Higher Education, The Conference of Rectors of Academic Schools in Poland (CRASP), *Preliminary proposals for law 2.0: General rules. Employees, Collective work* edited by Jerzy Woźnicki, Warsaw, July 2017

5 level qualifications in HE system: „Certificate of qualified specialist“ instead of a diploma... (2018)\*

The team of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education which prepared the draft of the Act proposed a different way of regulating the issue of level 5 programs.

- „specialist education“ outside the study system instead of short-cycle studies,
- possible only in non-university-type higher education institution,
- lack of quality assurance mechanisms for "specialist education" (PAC),
- a „certificate of qualified specialist“ and a „certificate of qualified technology specialist“ do not receive a diploma after completing „specialist education“,
- education may only be provided by non-university-type higher education institution



## Unsuccessful implementation

- **In the years 2013 - 2017** representatives of the academic community were asked:

*Is it worth introducing level 5 programs to higher education in Poland?*

- The university's response was generally positive

- **In 2019** representatives of the non-university-type higher education institution were asked:

*Do you plan (in the 2019/2020 academic year or in the following years) to implement in your college a specialist education program resulting in obtaining a full qualification at level 5?*

- Yes: 7 non-university-type higher education institution,
- No: 16 non-university-type higher education institution

## Unsuccessful implementation (2)

- Fundamental difficulties reported with „YES“
  - lack of a clear indication in the Act of the number of ECTS, which is the minimum for level 5 programs, so that it could be treated as a "short cycle" of studies;
  - no possibility of financing education at the 5th level from the state budget;
  - lack of a social campaign informing about the benefits related to the education offer on the 5th level;
  - no statutory (or other legal) solutions establishing the rules of transition between "specialist education" at PQF 5 and PQF 6 (bachelor, engineer) in the same fields of study.

\* Act of 20 July 2018 - Law on Higher Education and Science (Journal of Laws 2018 item 1668)

## Unsuccessful implementation (3)

- Main reasons for „NO“
  - lack of an information campaign aimed at employers and potential students about the specificity of level 5 education;
  - no interest in programs at the 5th level in the college surroundings;
  - lack of information and guidance on how to introduce level 5 programs into the offer and how to ensure their permeability with PQF level 6 programs;
  - lack of rules (implementing rules) regarding the financing of such programs;
  - no possibility of undertaking education at the 5th level by persons without a secondary school-leaving certificate.

2020

"Proposed changes to the provisions on education at level 5 of the PQF"

*(...waiting for the announced amendment to the Law on Higher Education and Science...)*

1. Incorporation of education at PQF level 5 into the study system

- unpaid full-time education
- evaluation of the quality of programs and entitlement to conduct them
- student status
- change of name to "short-cycle studies"

2. Enabling university-type HE-institutions to provide programs at PQF level 5

2020

"Proposed changes to the provisions on education at level 5 of the PQF"  
(2)

3.Regulation of the enrollment issue - persons entitled to be admitted to first-cycle studies or entitled to take the secondary school-leaving examination should be admitted

4. Improving regulations on validating learning outcomes (RPL)

2020

"Proposed changes to the provisions on education at level 5 of the PQF"

(3)

5. It is proposed to change the „certificate of qualified specialist“ and „certificate of qualified technology specialist“ into a „diploma“ and to recognize the titles of a certified specialist and a certified technologist as professional titles

6. It is proposed that the diploma should confirm higher vocational- or higher specialist education.

## Conclusions and recommendations

### What are the critical success factors?

- If level 5 qualifications are to fulfill their function, they must fit into the Bologna system
- If universities are to decide to "invest", i.e. to develop and introduce level 5 programs to their offer, it is not enough to introduce legal regulations; ministry, administration must support this process.

## Conclusions and recommendations

### What are the critical success factors?

- If level 5 qualifications are to fulfill their function, they must be credible and attractive to students and employers, which means among others:
  - ✓ ensuring their quality,
  - ✓ flexibility of validation (RPL),
  - ✓ reducing formal barriers to continuing studies at the next level (rules of transition between PQF 5 and PQF 6),
  - ✓ student status and related benefits
  - ✓ university diploma adequate to level 6 and 7 diplomas



# Thank you for your attention

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