



Level 5 in Dutch Professional Education; an example

CHAIN5 - 23 September 2022

Henri Ponds
NVAO

Origin

- Private higher education in the Netherlands is permitted by law since 1993. In the following years at their request a large number of private educational institutions were recognised by the government. The requirements of the applied recognition procedure were quite low
- In that period recognised institutions offered mainly short professional programmes with a maximum length of two years and in higher education. Few funded higher education institutions offered short programmes as well
- Private institutions (still) prefer short programmes because of fee and efficiency reasons; 'short is cheap and concise' and therefore attractive for students or their sponsors/payers
- Since 1993 and within ten years dozens of short programmes were part of higher education

'Bologna' and Accreditation

- As a result of the Bologna agreement of 1999 the Dutch government implemented programme accreditation and the bachelor-master system in higher education in 2004
- As a consequence short programmes could not be offered any longer. In higher professional and academic education only bachelor (240 EC) and master (60 EC) programmes were allowed
- But, the need of students and employers for short programmes did not disappear
- A successful lobby of several stakeholders (including the national employer organisation of small and medium sized enterprises) resulted in a 'rebirth of short programmes' in higher education
- By means of an experiment a new type of short programme in professional higher education was introduced in 2006; the Associate degree programme (Ad-programme)

The Associate degree programme

- The start of the Ad-programme meant the introduction of EQF-level 5 in Dutch Professional Education
- The sectors Vocational and Higher Education both claimed ownership of this new level in Dutch Professional Education. The government, as competent authority, decided to allocate level 5 in higher education:
 - to assure a substantial level step in relation to level 4
 - to facilitate the flow to level 6 (professional bachelor)
 - because the Netherlands has no tradition of higher vocational education
- The experiment expired in 2012 whereupon the Ad-programme became a permanent, substantial independent programme of the professional bachelor. Since 2018 the Ad-programme is a fully independent programme in higher education and no longer part of the professional bachelor programme
- Since 2006 the Ad-programme has developed to a mature programme type with currently more than 20.000 students

Current situation

- Meanwhile alumni graduates of Ad-programmes are very much appreciated in the professional field. The Ad-programme plays an important role in e.g. life long learning to offer employees the opportunity to develop to the EQF-levels 5 and 6
- Although only higher education institutions are entitled to offer Ad-programmes vocational institutions remain very ambitious to offer programmes on EQF-level 5
- In some cases vocational institutions try to operate as a subcontractor in a partnership with private higher education institutions in order to offer Ad-programmes
- The government tolerates this kind of cooperation so far. It is legally not forbidden but you might say 'against the spirit of the law'

External quality assurance

- External quality assurance (Accreditation) of Ad-programmes is part of the Accreditation system in Dutch higher education
- Every (Ad-)programme in Dutch HE is assessed by a panel of experts every six years and jointly with related Ad-programmes. Preferrably an expert from abroad (Flanders) is member of the panel
- The National Platform Associate degree facilitates the ongoing development of Ad-programmes and a futher identification of level 5; how can an Ad graduate be distinguished from a bachelor and level 4 graduate? What competencies are typical for an Ad graduate?
- A very interesting discussion is whether the identification of EQF-level 5 in different European countries is quite similar (in line with EQF-level 5 descriptors) or shows difference that partly is caused by the allocation of level 5 programmes; in vocational or higher education

Questions?





Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie
Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders

Parkstraat 28 • 2514 JK Den Haag
P.O. Box 85498 • 2508 CD The Hague
The Netherlands

T +31 (0)70 312 23 00
E info@nvao.net
www.nvao.net