



## Webinar ENQA and CHAIN5 - April 6, 2023

### CHAT and Q&A

A webinar was held on April 6, 2023 in collaboration between ENQA and CHAIN5. Its theme was to examine how countries are working on a 'National Level 5 Area (NL5A)'. This area includes the Short Cycle Higher Education (SCHE) as a recognized cycle within the European Higher Education Area, accepted as such within the Bologna process since 2018.

But in addition, in various countries there are other types of qualifications at level 5 (and often also 6) of the EQF. The most important is what falls under the Higher VET sector, but other names are also used.

The question is how accreditation organizations, being members of ENQA, are involved in having systems that guarantee the quality of those qualifications. It is also good to know whether comparable instruments and criteria are used. The role of the government is also important for a national approach.

Once it is clear that harmonization and agreements can be pursued across the entire spectrum for an NL5A, the cooperation between the organizations involved can be mapped out. That is the next step, to further see where ENQA and CHAIN5 can be of service to each other.

Introductions were given on the situations in Estonia, Ireland, Switzerland and the Netherlands. This showed that the national situations are clearly different, but that there is nevertheless reason to assume that what has now been put into effect is certainly useful.

The presentations can be found at:

<https://www.enqa.eu/events/enqa-webinar-external-qa-at-level-5-time-for-a-common-approach/>

In this report the comments in the chat and the questions in the Q&A section are checked. They are briefly commented. The intention is to include certain things in a subsequent webinar.

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We list the questions here. The answer and other comments, given immediately during the webinar or formulated later, are placed in between, in italics.

1. It was mentioned that a number of QA agencies, members of ENQA (members only or affiliates as well?), are also ENIC-NARIC centres. Could you please repeat the statistics?

*12 of ENQA's members or affiliates are NARICs*

*Out of how many ENQA members and affiliates?*

*12 from the 76 respondents (19%) of the recent QA FIT consultation... Can't answer for those that didn't respond and a % isn't really relevant in the overall ENQA context as we have affiliates from the Americas and SE Asia.*

2. For Ireland it is mentioned that private HE providers have to act under procedures both on institutional and programme level. What are key considerations to implement this higher external QA burden?

*Private providers are required to submit each programme to QQI for validation. We appoint the peer panel and formally approve the panel recommendation, whether positive or negative. Private HEIs have a lower institution-level monitoring burden than public HEIs because we see them "up-close" at programme level. Just now we are moving to implement a delegation of authority to approve programmes and make awards to the larger and long-established private HEIs. This is expected in 2024. This will reduce the external QA activity by QQI but the HEI will have to operate additional internal QA activity at programme level.*

3. I am broadly familiar with the extensive work QQI is doing to integrate QA processes for FE, HE and apprenticeships (at different levels including EQF L5). I am interested to know how the quality assurance of professional body awards (e.g. at EQF Level 5) might be integrated within the national system in Ireland",

*We are moving to implement new legislation that includes a wider range of qualifications in the NFQ. WE are currently drafting criteria and guidelines for what will be called "listed" awarding bodies. Most of the local inquiries we have had regarding this system have come from bodies making awards above EQF level 5, but some UK ABs that are already active in Ireland have expressed interest at the lower levels.*

See: <https://www.qqi.ie/what-we-do/the-qualifications-system/listed-awarding-bodies>.

4. I see that the Irish system is moving. Could you please clarify what influenced the initial decision for more intensive QA oversight over private providers?  
*Private HE emerged in Ireland in the 1990s and had no track record. The emphasis was on ensuring that the graduates would have well recognised qualifications so they had more intensive scrutiny than the traditional universities. The public technological HE sector (starting in the 1970s) followed a similar developmental path, with external QA of programmes until the 2000s*
5. Looking that what is happening in Ireland: The private sector appeared in Lithuania in 1999. So far, we have procedures both on institutional and programme level. The results show that private providers do face big difficulties in passing the institutional accreditation.  
*The development of adequate quality culture takes a long time, also here in Ireland. There are additional pressures on private providers whose business model may be more sensitive to fluctuations in demand. In our engagements with the private sector over the past 5/6 years QQI has emphasised governance structures and transparency rather than technical procedures for QA. We have had in Ireland recent changes to our legislation to ensure this. Curriculum design, evaluation, student supports, pedagogy are all well realised within the private sector but the organisational environment is key to sustaining these.*
6. Hans' presentation pointed to the key issue which is the vast diversity of educational and training programmes at Level 5. This raises the question what is more relevant for designing QA: the level or the sector education (HE, VET, etc.)? Is the similarity bigger between VET Levels 4 and 5 or between Level 5 HE and VET? I'm currently involved in developing a national approach for level 5 and realize that this is a highly controversial question.  
*These are certainly relevant and interesting aspects of the research we intend to conduct in the near future. There are systems where level 5 builds on what takes place in the VET sector up to and including level 4. Then it is important to be able to guarantee the level, together with having a program that also clearly builds on what is being done at level 4. offered. It is also obvious to take a good look at the descriptors for level 5. If there are also continuous learning pathways to programs in higher education, the characteristics of these must also be taken into account in order to ensure a smooth connection.  
If there is a SCHE in a country, there is often a situation in which someone with the diploma can continue for a Bachelor, i.e. level 6. But even then the practical component, as can be seen with programs within the VET sector (also at level 5), strongly present.  
In general it must be stated that it is important how the entire national level 5 area is approached. Based on this, it can be determined whether VET and HE can be designed as closely as possible at level 5. This also determines whether one opts for two types of qualifications at 5: Higher VET and SCHE or just one of them. This automatically leads you to the question of which to connect: VET or HE.  
Incidentally, with a binary system for higher education, i.e. with the professional and academic orientations, the connection with the Universities of Applied Sciences will mainly be sought, as in the Netherlands.  
So more later, after a next step in the research.*
7. Very interesting expositions. In the case of the countries that are part of the European Union, are they not applying EQAVET? In the case of Spain, a law of organization and integration of Vocational Training, approved this year, makes mandatory the application of this protocol in levels 3, 4 and 5 of VET. In the Canary Islands we are developing this protocol, based on the experience we have in applying the ESG. ACCUEE, in collaboration with the regional ministry of education, is responsible for developing and implementing EQAVET.

*This is certainly relevant to our investigation of the systems used at level 4. There is also contact with the European Commission about this, to see how EQAVET can also be used for level 5.*

*As CHAIN5, we certainly want to use the approach in Spain and the experiences that are being gained. It can also be examined how the transfer to higher education can be supported more strongly in this way.*

8. Bryan Maguire: Colleagues interested in the "tertiary" concept referred to by Douglas may be interested in this CGHE conference next month. <https://researchcghe.org/events/cghe-annual-conference/cghe-annual-conference-2023-from-higher-to-tertiary-democratising-post-school-education/>

*From the website:*

*Is it Time to Rethink Our Model of Post-Secondary Education? Progressing a Tertiary Education Eco-System*

*Speaker: Ellen Hazelkorn (BH Associates and TU Dublin)*

*Near universal participation in higher education has been a huge achievement for OECD countries. Yet, globalization and geopolitical shifts, an ageing population, the technological and digital revolutions leading to increasing use of automation and AI, and strategies for sustainable green and blue economy – alongside changes arising from the Covid-19 pandemic – are reshaping our societies, how and where we live and the world of work.*

*Despite these developments and macro-trends, the model of educational provision has remained relatively unchanged as if it was still a system catering to a small elite. Attention is drawn to learners gradually being “left behind” by the current system and/or unable to access the system in any meaningful/sustained way. This has consequences for social cohesion and political participation.*

*By 2030, higher skills will constitute more than 40% of the required skills mix, but almost 45% of jobs will require medium level skills – those which require some postsecondary education and training, but less than a four-year college degree. As the population ages, people will require upskilling, re-skilling or repurposing their qualification in response to changes in the labour market – or their own personal life choices. Universities have been too slow to adapt and VET colleges have often been stymied by social-cultural and policy factors and considerably less funding and resources.*

*Much more radical thinking is required as to how we structure, govern, fund and deliver post-secondary/post-compulsory education. This is driving many countries to reframe the policy discussion around the tertiary education eco-system, inclusive of formal, non-formal, “second-chance” and life-long learning opportunities. But, beyond the headlines what do we mean by tertiary education? What do we want to achieve?*

*In my talk, I will look at factors driving change across our societies and education systems and at policy discussions from an international perspective. Finally, I will consider what a tertiary education eco-system might look like and reflect on some implications for our universities and FE/VET colleges.*

*As CHAIN5, we want to analyze the results after this conference and we will contact the CGHE. We also aim for an approach where the tertiary system is important, including all possible sectors – as mentioned above. That makes having a national level 5 area a lot simpler and more transparent.*