

**The structure of a  
'High Vocational-Professional Education (HVPE) Area'  
and  
a 'European Level 5 (EL5) Area'  
&  
Ideas for international common names and terms  
in the Tertiary Education Area  
*Incl. a proposal for having a process for those developments***

**Part 1**

**Introduction**

This document is bursting with ambitions. You will have to agree with this as you read it. But it is certainly necessary to meet the challenges associated with the proposals. There are quite a few of these, especially when it comes to an international approach to newly formulated educational sectors. In fact, many countries are already involved in this today and there will certainly be more over time. Consider the Bologna Process that started in 1999 with a number of countries within the European Union and where many more countries are now prepared to use the agreements concerning the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

We want to provide substantive input for a comparable process with a number of documents - of which this is the first one in a short series. That process should be focused on the education sector for the levels 5 and higher of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), which emerged parallel to the EHEA and is becoming increasingly important. As CHAIN5 we will give this sector the international name 'High Vocational-Professional Education Area (HVPEA)'. This growing attention is partly due to the use of that EQF and the national frameworks that are increasingly used for comparing qualifications.

As such, it concerns a education sector that, like the EHEA, is part of the 'Tertiary Education Area'. This TEA is formed by the qualifications at levels 5 and higher of the EQF and therefore the comparable levels of the NQFs. In recent years, people have always talked about 'Higher Vocational Education and Training (Higher VET)', as one of the options to build on the VET sector (up to and including level 4). But more and more other formats have been added, partly due to the collaboration with the Professional Higher Education Area (PHE Area) as part of the EHEA and the creation of stand-alone Colleges for level 5 and often also together with level 6.

That is why we now explicitly refer to the 'High Vocational-Professional Education Area' as an international term. The HVPE Area (HVPEA) is therefore for formal qualifications at levels 5 and higher, as a sector that can be positioned parallel to the EHEA.

In recent years we have noticed that the lack of a form of coordination between countries in the further development of a national 'VPE Area' - also in connection with the national 'HEA' - leads to a lot of ambiguity and confusion surrounding international cooperation. That is a pity and also unnecessary.

Therefore, here is a general and broad-based proposal with regard to making agreements on the international context concerning the HVPE Area. Each country can then organize or adapt its own education system on this basis, since 'education' is simply a national responsibility.

In short, if a 'HVPE process' can be initiated in 2024, we would like to support it without further ado. We think that the most important point of application can be the offer at level 5, with the 'Level 5

Area (L5 Area)' as a hinge between the sectors involved. This makes it an extra challenge, but it is worth it.

This document is number 1 in a small series on topics that touch on the introduction of the VPE Area and therefore the associated sector, as well as the further positioning of the L5 Area as a connecting sector in a horizontal sense: HVPEA and EHEA, and in a vertical sense: Secondary and Tertiary.

The topics within this series are:

1. Classification of tertiary education, the positioning of the VPEA and the use of international common names
2. A closer look at the division of tertiary education
3.
  - a Levels within the HVPEA
  - b Learning paths within the HVPEA
  - c Progression from 5 (HVPE - SCHE) to 6 (First Cycle)
  - d Top-Up programmes at level 5
  - e Specific solutions for SCHE and level 5 – national context
4. Subdivision within the HVPEA and certificates
5. The positioning of the L5A
6. Use of credits in tertiary education, linked to sectors
7. Harmonization of instruments for the EHEA and the HVPEA – for example looking at the European Standards and Guidelines, the Dublin Descriptors and the ECTS for the EHEA, EQAVET, EQF-LLL descriptors and ECVET respectively.
8. Use of micro-credentials in the EL5A
9. Why having the EHEA and the HVPEA next to each other...

### **CHAIN5**

CHAIN5 is the 'international community of practice for level 5 qualifications'. Over the past ten years, with the efforts of many stakeholders, we have succeeded in generating attention for the design of 'a Level 5 Area' in Europe. This has led to adjustments to the system in a growing number of countries by also effectively completing a National Level 5 Area. A result is that we can see a strong growth in student numbers in many countries, demonstrating that there is an undeniable need for this type of qualification. Further information can be found on the website [www.chain5.net](http://www.chain5.net).

### **Why CHAIN5 as a driver**

As CHAIN5, we are taking the initiative for this topic and thus for a discussion that, in our opinion, needs to be formed in order to achieve innovation within tertiary education - levels 5 and higher. This could lead to an international process, involving countries, organizations and experts who will endorse this aim in the near future.

Naturally, such an initiative can in principle be taken from a lot of angles and with the support of many organizations. In recent years we have noted that various plans have been continuously formulated, but these have not (yet) led to concrete actions. Many projects also touch on what is discussed in this and the following documents, and we will try to include them in the plans.

In addition, it can be seen that many countries have already started to further develop their national tertiary education system due to the lack of an international form of coordination. They have of course had to make choices, also when it comes to the type of qualifications, the possible providers and the names that can be used in the international context. It therefore appears that international coordination regarding coordination is not yet in the offing in the short term.

Level 5 with various types of qualifications cuts across all sectors, vertically and horizontally. As CHAIN5 we can therefore be a connecting factor, without being focused on a specific sector. Hence this document and our proposals.

### **Reading Guide**

We will first list everything in a number of parts. Through the content you can see what we discuss so that you can also take in all this in a completely different order. We have put our most important issues in boxes, so that you can quickly discover what is going on.

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**Preamble**

This document concerns proposals relating to the international Tertiary Education Area, based on all types of formal and non-formal qualifications at levels 5 to 8 of the EQF. This TEA is divided into a number of sectors (areas). These can be clearly defined on the basis of a number of criteria and with the use of instruments that explicitly determine such a sector.

This is an approach that applies to the international classification of the TEA and the sectors indicated therein. In addition, English names are given that are proposed to be used in the international context. These can be used in international cooperation and agreements based on this between countries, institutions and organizations, as the associated sectors have their own defined characteristics.

Every country that wants to participate in this process in one way or another has complete freedom to design its own 'National Tertiary Education Area', with a self-chosen subdivision and appropriate criteria. Choices are made regarding having names for all kinds of concepts, often in the national language. If the government then uses English translations within one's own official communication about the national system, it can also choose one's own approach. There is no international body that can prescribe and enforce this.

We hope that in the coming years more and more countries will base themselves on our proposal and work with it. This can be compared to the Bologna Process that led to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Voluntary agreements have been established that people can adhere to in all kinds of partnerships. It is true that there are still countries that design certain deviating constructions, for all kinds of reasons. Countries can address each other within the EHEA about these matters, but never force each other to make the right adjustments. This can lead to misunderstandings and less transparent constructions and that is why we hope that our initiative will also lead to a form of harmonization for every National HEA.

In short, we work with international proposals and every country may and may participate in the process that we intend to initiate.

**In short**  
**Focus on**  
***The High Vocational-Professional Education Area***  
**and**  
***the European Level 5 Area***

This first general part of this series is intended to outline our plans for achieving a more transparent classification of what is offered at levels 5 and higher of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), and thus of the National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) associated with it. That is why we will discuss what is already there, what is going on and how international research is being conducted into which types of formal and non-formal qualifications can be included in this Tertiary Education Area (TEA).

The chapters of this part are therefore expressly intended to provide an impetus for further discussions in an international context. In addition, countries such as these that already participate in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), i.e. in the Bologna Process, can see how they think they can contribute to this for their own national tertiary education area. Then we are talking about a National Higher Education Area (NHEA).

***Process for qualifications parallel to the EHEA – High Vocational-Professional Education***

But first of all, the focus is very explicitly on a subsequent process that we have in mind and which has to do with the positioning of all formal qualifications that are provided in parallel to the EHEA and the NHEAs) at levels 5 and higher. A lot is already going on in this regard in many countries, but as we show in this part 1, it is also necessary to initiate an international process for this. The desired transparency within the tertiary education area undoubtedly benefits from this. National and international cooperation between providers of formal qualifications can be prevented from being hampered in the near future by uncertainty about the status of qualifications and possibly their providers.

***International name for this parallel education area explained***

This will be discussed further in this document, but here is a brief explanation of the name we propose to use internationally for the space that is parallel to the EHEA, namely High Vocational-Professional Education Area, so HVPE Area, HVPEA.

The combination of Vocational and Professional points to an education area that can build on the VET sector but is also close to the Professional Higher Education sector, especially if countries have a binary higher education system. This way you can always play flexibly with the design of the HVPE Area, in the national context.

We do not use the term 'European' in the name. As the Bologna Process shows, there is much more interest in joining in. We expect this to also happen for a process surrounding the HVPE Area.

It is important to consider the use of 'High' in the name. We are not concerned with 'Higher', as a form of contradiction, possibly thinking of 'lower' qualifications. Including 'High' is a reference to levels 5 and above. We can also do justice to the positioning that has been used in various countries, with the use of national and international concepts. Its 'value' can be honored as such.

***European Level 5 Area***

It is also the case that, in line with initiating a process to arrive at international agreements for the High Vocational-Professional Education Area – and appropriate 'instruments' – we draw attention to the educational area that has to do with all qualifications at level 5 of the EQF. That area is also part of the Tertiary Education Area, and therefore runs straight through the EHEA and the HVPE Area. It also provides the bridge from secondary to tertiary education, i.e. for levels 4 and 6. This will therefore also be discussed in this document and the other parts of this series.

## **PART I – BACKGROUNDS EXPOSED**

### **1.1 Introduction**

This document provides suggestions for achieving international harmonization of the design and classification of the education system for levels 5 and higher of the EQF and the corresponding NQFs. In connection with this, English terms and concepts that are used in the international context for formal education within this system are examined, with a view to reaching international agreements on common names for all relevant concepts.

The aim is to make everything more recognizable and transparent when international cooperation takes place and all kinds of plans and strategies are used, developed and updated. It is emphatically not the intention to have the national systems and associated classifications adjusted in this way and/or to make national names, terms and concepts mandatory. Agreement on international coordination in those areas can subsequently contribute to a better form of understanding across national borders.

### **1.2 Few background notes, to start with... the Bologna Process**

We start with the Bologna Process. Since its inception at the end of the last century, a lot of work has been done to shape what is now known as the 'European Higher Education Area (EHEA)'. Over the years, many countries from outside the EU have joined in, in order to significantly increase their opportunities for international cooperation. It is still 'European', but it is actually better to speak of a 'Higher Education Area' as such.

#### ***Agreements for the higher education area***

All kinds of agreements have been made for the EHEA in order to improve and increase the recognisability of higher education between countries. Important instruments are mainly the use of 'European Credits (EC)', a diploma supplement, the European Standard and Guidelines for quality assurance and having the Dublin Descriptors. Only courses and study programmes that meet these requirements and then fit into one of the four formal cycles are considered to be part of a higher education system.

#### ***Binary system in higher education***

In addition, a country may have a binary higher education system, i.e. it may have two types of orientations: Professional and Academic. It is up to each government whether or not to have a binary classification, but in all cases the agreements within the EHEA apply to all providers, i.e. the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). These institutions then fall under a National Higher Education Area (NHEA). In a binary system we can talk about a 'University' and a 'Professional Higher Education Institution', but we will come back to that.

#### ***Agreements about international names***

All kinds of international agreements have been made about the use of English names for certain aspects of the EHEA and therefore of an NHEA if countries can communicate internationally. But these agreements are not mandatory in the formal sense. It is always up to a national government to decide how to deal with these agreements in the national and subsequently the appropriate international context. As mentioned, this stems from the fact that 'education' and the associated system is by definition a national matter. Within the EU, let alone outside it, there are no options for Brussels to impose obligations on national governments.

#### ***National responsibility***

Naturally, we have been working for years with all kinds of European budgets for education and training, at all levels. But they can also be used on a voluntary basis by a country and education providers and their organizations. In line with this, there are all kinds of European and international working groups and platforms in which discussions are held about possible joint coordination on all kinds of matters, but in principle each country can also pursue its own policy regarding its use and embedding in all kinds of systems.

This is also an example of the vulnerability of the EHEA because there is no formal central control over compliance with these agreements and the ability to hold each other accountable. Meetings are held periodically by the ministers involved in higher education, but this mainly concerns examining new developments and how further non-binding agreements can be made about them.

### **Role of the EQF**

There was and is therefore a lot of focus on the EHEA. But in the past twenty years, a lot has also been initiated regarding education, research and training - formal and non-formal. This may also be due to the success of the Bologna process, which has made it clear that, in principle, common agreements can be made as a basis for cooperation, but in which countries can see in their own way where the benefits lie in participating.

Since 2008, an important development that plays a role in this is the formal use of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) for positioning formal and non-formal qualifications offered in a country, linking them as such to an NQF. All countries within the EU (and many of the countries that have joined the EQF) now have a working system for this. This means that comparable qualifications in different countries can lead to cooperation in a specific context, useful for the mobility of students, learners and workers.

### **NHEA and NQF**

This means, among other things, that a country may or may not work with a formal link between the National Higher Education Area (NHEA) and the associated cycles (and degrees) to levels 5, 6, 7 and 8 of the EQF and thus to the corresponding levels of the NQF. One can also choose to allow the NHEA to retain its own place in the educational system for all kinds of reasons, based on the so-called QF-EHEA, but then to introduce other formal and non-formal qualifications at those levels through its own procedure. This can be done via a 'National Coordination Point (NCP)' or a comparable national organization.

### **Specific developments around level 5**

To mention a few specific developments concerning level 5 of the EQF, which will also be discussed later when it concerns general matters and are expressly related to this:

- After the formal inclusion of the Short Cycle Higher Education (SCHE) in the EHEA in 2018 as a stand-alone cycle with its own status, there has been a strong growth in the supply of associated qualifications in countries that offer this opportunity within Higher Education;
- The range of formal and non-formal qualifications at level 5 of the EQF has grown in many countries, made visible by being linked to the corresponding level of the NQF;
- There is the emergence of independent educational institutions that offer formal qualifications at level 5, and often in combination with level 6, parallel to the NHEA, with their own relevance for the labor market and with their own specific organization in mind for the quality assurance system;
- There is a clear growth in demand for qualifications that build on the offering within the VET sector up to and including level 4 of the EQF, and are thus offered at level 5 and higher, possibly by the same VET institutions, but also within independent institutions.

### **1.3 Getting the structure in order with transparency**

With the ever-increasing need for international cooperation at all levels, including in view of the above developments in a sector that deserves a lot of attention, the urgent question is whether it is really time to make common agreements on the use of names, concepts and terms for all kinds of matters related to it.

There are many initiatives and projects that look at what could be set up by institutions across country borders, preferably in the broadest possible approach and context. This then provides more opportunities to involve more parties without having to wonder what is meant by a particular concept. Possible obstacles within an Erasmus+ approach can also be removed by clarifying in which setting the partners in a project operate and what their status is, both nationally and internationally.

The other side of the story is whether there would be a problem if those joint agreements were not made for that parallel sector (levels 5 and higher), in addition to the EHEA. Each country can always have its own considerations and then not use what is proposed. As mentioned, there is no organization in Europe or beyond that has the power to prescribe something and then enforce it. This concerns a broad area with regard to the range of qualifications on offer.

This happens through all kinds of sectors that have their own history, (very) long but sometimes only (very) short. The EHEA therefore has its own instruments, such as the frameworks for internal

and external quality assurance, for which the ENQA organization serves as a platform for the affiliated national accreditation organizations. But there are also several players active 'in the field' of how training courses should function when it comes to labor market relevance, efficiency and the requirements regarding level and quality.

***A kind of international compendium (handbook) may be useful***

Nevertheless, we think it is worthwhile to use this document, in connection with the discussion about a process for the VPE sector, to initiate the preparation of a kind of 'handbook' for the use of common names and terms. At the instigation of the European Commission, the aim is to create a 'European Education Area' in the not too distant future, with all affiliated countries as supporting members, as a complete bundling of all sectors at all levels.

Then such a conceptual framework can only be very useful for the higher levels. But also in the pursuit of 'European University Alliances' in which international networks are set up around higher education and research, this means that there must be common language use in terms of collaboration to clarify the target groups that are being worked on.

We are therefore fully aware that in recent years choices have been made in many countries regarding the use of national names and terms and, according to the government, appropriate English-language 'translations', without being able to use an international source because there is simply not one. Nevertheless, we make the proposal in the belief that in the long term every country can benefit from this, and therefore also Europe and countries that would like to join all kinds of frameworks. This has been clearly visible in recent years, which gives us confidence in taking this initiative.

**1.4 Taking care of agreements – and a committee...**

As stated above, the EU (along with all those countries that would like to participate in what is being developed and agreed within the EU) does not have its own agency that can be asked to draw up the necessary frameworks as outlined here. Agreements are always made in consultations between countries and by as many ministers as possible who meet to discuss all kinds of developments. They can also send national representatives when it comes to specific sectors to exchange ideas and outline possible frameworks. But those people and organizations will always have to go back to their own government to ratify any matters. This can certainly slow things down if additional requirements arise from the national context. Interests must also be weighed up if this does not lead to a compromise.

***Set up a small committee to coordinate the start-up phase***

Our proposal involves setting up an international committee of limited size to coordinate matters as best as possible, with the option of providing targeted advice. Who can and should take the initiative for this can be seen in the near future, together with a number of European organizations that are closely involved in this subject.

**2.1 Examples of 'confusion' – a reason for our initiative**

Before we go into outlining our proposals regarding the design of the European Tertiary Education Area, and then looking at the Vocational-Professional Area including the Level 5 Area, here are a number of examples of the confusion that has and could arise if there is no clear agreements have been made regarding positioning and design.

- The second cycle within the EHEA is in principle linked to the general Bachelor's degree, also in countries with a binary system, but the name 'Professional Bachelor' is also still used.
- The Short Cycle HE label is attached to qualifications in all kinds of ways, without them meeting the criteria established for this within the EHEA.
- Specific names are used for certain qualifications in a country at level 5, but then an English name is added to them which can be confusing as it is a variant of 'Short Cycle HE'. Examples are Short Program HE and Short Cycle Tertiary Education.
- Countries that have formally introduced the SCHE have often come up with a national name for it, but no international degree has yet been agreed on for the English name, resulting in different names such as Associate (degree) and Foundation Degree.
- We will have a short document 3e for this, but there can be very creative solutions for having not level 5 in the NHEA but in practice it will be a SCHE programme. An example is to have



this programme 'within the first cycle' and divide level 6 into two stages: 6.1 (SCHE as such) and 6.2. Next to this there are level 5 qualifications in the VPE Area.

- The third cycle has a number of degrees, such as PhD, Doctorate and Doctor, but some countries also use variations on this.
  - In countries with a binary system for higher education, providers of Professional Higher Education have their own national name. Some of them: Fachhochschule, Hochschule, Høgskolen, Högskolan, Instituto Politécnico, Universidad tecnológica, Sveučilište... In English it is called a University of Applied Sciences in many countries, but it can also be an Applied Higher Education Institution, Technological University, Polytechnic, University College, University of the Fine Arts, or something else.
- For institutions that do not belong to providers within higher education but to a parallel sector, English names are used in addition to their own national name. This can be seen, for example, in the use of the term College or Institute 'for Higher Vocational Education' or 'for Higher Vocational Training'.

## **2.2 Who should arrange this, and who can do it?**

It is a national responsibility to consider how an education system can best be organized, especially when it comes to formal qualifications. In this context, formal means that there is a clear role for the government, through one or more ministries and related organizations. This may concern matters such as funding of certain sectors, carrying out accreditations, assessing the effectiveness of the offering, monitoring the quality of courses and institutions, encouraging the design of lifelong learning, monitoring cooperation with the business community, and there may be other matters in which the government has a clear involvement.

The resulting legislation is therefore also the responsibility of the government. All kinds of regulations are linked to this, to ensure that everything is and remains feasible in practice.

Especially in higher education, institutions are often autonomous in their actions, of course within the limits of the law and regulations, with all kinds of necessary frameworks. They have their own national networks and associations that are discussion partners for the government. This allows the institutions to try to influence government policy and strategy.

Naturally, there is a role in all this for politicians, i.e. parliament, who control the government in their own way through the formally established structure. They can come up with bills and thus force the government to address issues, change and innovate.

### ***International coordination and agreements***

This means that if international agreements are made for education and training, there must be an opportunity to bring together representatives of national governments and determine, on the basis of a joint 'memorandum of understanding', to which matters those agreements will apply. Failure to adhere to these agreements cannot lead to sanctions, if only because there is also for this kind of issues no 'international inspectorate' that can make a decision to that effect. It does mean that people can informally address each other about 'deviant actions', but the consequences are only reporting it in public documents.

In addition, there are all kinds of funds approved by the European Parliament, intended for education. There are arrangements for distributing these funds through the European Commissions and it is useful to be able to do this on the basis of common definitions. This can prevent confusion about the target groups, the objectives and the method of expenditure. This can be an incentive to continue to know 'what matters when spending European money', at least at an international level.

### ***Mirroring the Bologna Process... in some way***

Of course, the most striking example of a form of collaboration is the 'Bologna Process' that started at the end of the last century. The result is the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in which around 46 countries now formally participate, including those from outside the EU. Various agreements have been made about a number of characteristic aspects of higher education.

The ministers for higher education meet periodically to discuss the state of affairs for the EHEA and to consider how further cooperation can be achieved. This includes conducting research, setting up European University Alliances (using European funds) and also initiating efforts to link

the EHEA to plans within the EU for a 'European Education Area (EEA)', so for the entire education and training system at all levels and all sectors.

### **3.1 EEA examined in more detail in this context**

The EEA is an initiative that was launched in Brussels a number of years ago by the European Commission. The EC hopes that as many countries as possible will participate in order to achieve such a common 'total system', also because of the use of the budgets linked to the Erasmus+ fund. A lot of money is involved and therefore participating in the further development of such an EEA can be profitable.

There are all kinds of plans for the EEA on the table. The state of affairs will be assessed in 2025, but in the meantime it can already be noticed that more and more countries are showing interest in such a European system. The point is not that a national education system must necessarily be derived from this, but it offers the opportunity to learn from each other and whether constructions can be effective in designing learning paths that can be shaped within a sector but also that can cut across the sectors.

### **3.2 EVETA: also in the planning for Europe**

Another important initiative that was recently taken by the European Parliament, but has also been raised before, has to do with the desire to create a process that should lead to the 'European Vocational Education and Training Area (EVETA)', within the EEA. The intention is, as happened with the EHEA, to seek harmonization of the system for VET qualifications, taking into account its importance for the international business world, international trade and the ability to collaborate on innovations. But being able to work together in filling all kinds of positions and activities and providing training and shaping labor mobility is also an important point of attention.

A specific point is the involvement of the business community in making training and education possible for workers. This requires all kinds of work-based learning, tailored to the possibilities that learners have when they have a job.

Naturally, the providers of VET qualifications play a role in all of this. It is true that there are all kinds of forms of VET education, partly depending on the classifications that are also used nationally. There is an enormous diversity when it comes to providers and the way in which they are involved in formal and non-formal qualifications.

It is possible that this initiative for an EVETA will be picked up by a number of countries at some point to start that process. And we can use this also.

### **3.3 Other sub-sectors in the EEA**

We will come back to this later, but the pursuit of an EEA that includes the EHEA and possibly such an EVETA can lead to more attention for all kinds of 'subsystems' and 'subsectors'. Naturally, this takes place within the framework of such an EEA, but it offers the opportunity for more transparency within the entire system and for better cooperation between providers of the underlying qualifications.

### **3.4 Starting up an approach and a process**

In any case, it means that processes related to harmonization require the involvement of as many countries as possible. This does not mean, for example, that the current 47 countries of the EHEA all have to join immediately. But if there is a large enough group to make agreements with, there may then be a process in which other countries will join in. However, it is true that at least within such a process it must be clear what the possible consequences are for the EHEA and how the criteria and instruments developed therein can be linked to them.

### **4.1 Higher Education as a concept – and to be preserved**

With the introduction of the EHEA, the concept of 'higher education' was emphatically given a place in every national education system. This could be with the offering of qualifications only by Universities, but it could also be in a binary system with, in addition to the Universities, the - which is now often used - Universities of Applied Sciences (but as already mentioned, there are more English names are used – and we will discuss the proposal for an 'umbrella English' name later).

In the first case it concerns the concept as such: 'higher education'. In the second case, an 'orientation' is added: Academic HE and Professional HE, in most situations so called in the international context.

### **Criteria for Higher Education programmes and the EHEA**

Very strictly speaking, these higher education institutions (HEIs) must meet the criteria set for a provider within the EHEA, i.e. the Bologna Process. But here too, this agreement does not entail any obligation for a government. The vast majority of countries that have a National Higher Education Area (NHEA) have organized this sector very strictly as such. But there are also a few others who have qualifications that do not meet all the agreed criteria or, on the other hand, others that also apply to different sectors. This is usually a conscious approach, in order to be able to defend multiple interests in its own country and to avoid an administrative dispute.

This can make it particularly difficult when it comes to mapping situations in countries, especially when international and research questions are asked about developments related to a NHEA. It is then clear that the answers are difficult to compare without knowing the exact differences in the design of the NHEA. More detailed insight will therefore have to be obtained if there is a suspicion that there is a deviation from the common criteria and instruments for the EHEA.

It also matters a lot which organization is asked about this situation and developments, to ensure that a complete picture can be sketched based on the answers. National education systems often fall as a whole under a specific ministry, but then their own (administrative) subdivisions have been made so that it is not always possible to paint a complete picture without consulting all those involved.

### **4.2 High and Low – to be avoided where possible**

What always and still causes a lot of discussion in all kinds of countries is that using the term 'higher' implies that there is also something 'lower'. This has a clear impact on the position of courses in the sectors 'below' higher education, especially when it comes to formulating the admission requirements for higher education. The VET sector in particular has to deal with this, given its status among all kinds of target groups, such as parents and study counselors.

The situation has grown to such an extent that abandoning the concept of HE is not reasonable. The concept is so closely intertwined with all kinds of systems, developments and plans in the international context that no attempt should be made to come up with another name for HE as embedded in the EHEA.

### **Higher VET... no use anymore...**

However, in recent years it has meant that in the slipstream of the EHEA, in many countries for other formal qualifications that do not fall under the HE but are provided in parallel with it, the concept 'higher' was also included in the national name, but above all in the international name. This, as it were, benefits from belonging to the higher levels and thus also from the status of HE. The best-known and early example is having 'Higher Vocational Education and Training', i.e. Higher VET, sometimes also abbreviated to HVET. Its use has subsequently led to other names in recent years to achieve even more distinction. This does not always contribute to the required transparency of the entire system, especially when it comes to the international context.

That is the main reason for refraining from using 'higher' as such in the proposed new names for qualifications that can already be found as such at the 'higher levels'. We will explain this further in the document, saying already that we can use the term 'high' in a clear context...

### **5.1 EQF and NQF**

Another important development that we would like to use a little further and therefore explain in the light of our proposals is the general introduction of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) in 2008, as a reference framework with eight levels and associated descriptors.

Each country then started introducing an associated National Qualifications Framework (NQF), often also with eight levels, but each country can deviate from this for demonstrable reasons. In this way, the levels of related courses can be compared with each other, making international cooperation possible.

This year (2023) the moment has been reached that all countries that have embraced the EQF will have an NQF that is accepted by each other as a reference. This means that further agreements can be made about a form of transparency with the help of the EQF.

### **Observations here... relevant...**

A number of observations that are relevant here:

- For the international VET sector as such, levels up to and including 4 are used. The situation that the highest level is 4 has to do with the fact that about ten years ago it was decided within the EHEA to view this level as the highest one providing access to HE. This decision was accepted by the VET sector within Europe, partly because there were no organizations that could express their objection.
- Many countries have claimed levels 5 and higher for HE and also for Higher VET (which we now want to call High Vocational-Professional Education – High VPE).
- However, there are several countries that still respect this decision but have not assigned a level to the cycles and degrees within their own NHEA. The names Bachelor and Master are used for the first respectively second cycle, but they expressly want to prevent non-formal qualifications or Higher VET at levels 6 and 7 from also being equated in status with those degrees.
- This means that countries can have two types of frameworks: an NQF without the HE and the NHEA for the HE (also called QF-EHEA).

### **5.2 Do not use ISCED for this framework anymore, but do use it only for statistics**

With the introduction of the EQF and the associated process to arrive at an NQF in all interested countries, the use of this framework quickly became popular. Within formal education, nationally and especially internationally, documents and communications – including within the European Commission – simply refer to the levels of the EQF. It has therefore become a widespread standard.

In addition, every government wants to use all kinds of statistics surrounding education to know what the effects are of interfering with it. This is certainly important when it comes to spending the budgets that a government has available for all sectors. People would like to see it lead to a population that is expected to be increasingly highly educated. This can be done through formal education, but it can also be done through additional education and training. Those who drop out during formal training should also be 'appreciated' for what has been achieved.

That's why ISCED exists. It is the reference 'international classification for organizing education programs' and related qualifications by levels and fields. ISCED 2011 (levels of education) has been implemented in all EU data collections since 2014, and ISCED-F 2013 (fields of education and training) since 2016.

It means that two systems are, as it were, intertwined. Many countries now only state the NQF level on the formal diplomas, and then do nothing with the ISCED in that sense. One consequence is that formal training courses are given a ranking. Then, for example, level 5 is 'higher' than level 4, and this affects the perception of the status of a course among the target groups, such as young people, parents, employers and also politicians. So nothing can be done about that, even though all levels have their own descriptors and value for the 'world of work'.

### **5.3 Post-secondary 'in addition to' higher education: no further formal use**

A situation that could possibly make everything more complex is that there is also talk about having 'post-secondary' education. This is especially the case in countries such as the US and Canada. But here in Europe too, the VET sector and the general education sector are included in secondary education. This opened the way for the providers of secondary education to call everything that was built on it, i.e. as an extension of it, 'post-secondary'.

Although higher education can be started with a secondary education, in certain countries the VET sector wanted to put its own 'stamp' on the higher levels and maintain the connection with secondary education, certainly building on general education (think of the High School). But as mentioned, the VET sector subsequently did not opt in the last decade for the term 'Post', but for 'Higher'. So no 'Post VET' but 'Higher VET'.

A situation that is conceivable in that context, and this is actually how this concept of 'post-secondary' has been used, is that after having a diploma at level 4, there is still the possibility of obtaining additional, in-depth certificates for units or small programmes. This means that everything remains at level 4 (or slightly above), and in order to make it distinctive from the formal courses, a concept such as 'post-secondary' is obvious. This is easily conceivable within the system used for statistics, ISCED, for example to measure how many people receive additional training. Within the context of lifelong learning, this is also useful for the government to have insight into this. But as already indicated, the use of the EQF within education systems, together with the NQFs, can increasingly cause confusion about the use of levels and associated names and concepts. Choices will therefore have to be made and these now lead to focusing only on the use of the EQF and the NQFs.

## Part II PROPOSALS

In this section we list the proposals we have in mind. Explanations are provided. However, there may be an overlap with what was discussed in part 1. Certain matters are also briefly repeated or summarized in a certain context. This can prevent the need to work with references.

### 6.1 In general

Based on what has been outlined above in terms of developments, intentions, plans and possibilities for the international design of the education system, we would like to make a number of proposals that are in line with this. These are thoughts that we can discuss with all partners, stakeholders and other organizations who believe that a clear approach to having transparency internationally is a priority for the coming years.

These proposals are therefore mainly about seeking transparency for the supply of qualifications at levels 5 and higher of the EQF. But the combination with the system at levels up to and including 4 is also taken into account. As mentioned above, an initiative has also been put forward through the European Parliament to harmonize the European system for the VET sector, which can actually be seen as an attempt to follow the same path as what we call the Bologna Process for higher education. An EEA can therefore serve as a kind of 'umbrella' for 'everything'.

#### *International context is leading for the process*

Before we make the proposals, it is good to emphasize again that this concerns the international context for having an education system. That context can serve as a reference for the national systems, but it is and remains the responsibility of the national government to shape its own system and whether or not to choose to join all kinds of international agreements.

We also realize that the proposals mean that a lot of consultation and persuasiveness is needed to get countries that want to participate in this form of streamlining of international agreements to the point where a project can be started to see how to achieve results. In addition, the Bologna process, the consultations on arriving at an EEA and possibly also giving an impetus for an EVETA, continue as usual.

We would therefore like to argue that this document and the proposals contained in it should be included in these developments. All kinds of cases can easily be investigated and dealt with in parallel.

### 6.2 Reasons and arguments

In fact, the publication of this document is for a very simple reason, namely that in the past twenty years a lot of attention has been paid to the development of the EHEA and subsequently the countries involved have not sufficiently realized that a lot of things are also in progress, within their own country without clear international frameworks.

With the introduction of the EQF and the growth of learning pathways beyond level 4 and especially the VET sector, the greatly increased opportunities for 'study migration' at all levels, in conjunction with an expansion of international labor market, has prompted the search for more international cooperation between providers of formal education.

It is good to consider the role of Erasmus+ for projects, the introduction of Centers of Vocational Excellence, the collaboration on designing learning paths using qualifications at level 5 and especially the growth of the supply at the higher levels of qualifications that build on what VET Colleges already provide in terms of education.

It also means that based on these developments, much can be achieved through forms of cooperation, using all types of qualifications that are formally linked to the higher levels of an NQF, and therefore also of the EQF. The confusion that can now be observed - as previously explained here in part I with various examples - can only be prevented further if further agreements are made about the international education system, and primarily about the classification and names for the concepts to be used.

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### **7.1 System (5 and above) in the international context – tertiary education area**

The first proposal involves putting all types of qualifications (courses, programmes, pathways and the like) at EQF levels 5 and higher under the concept of 'tertiary', i.e. belonging to the 'Tertiary Education Area (TEA)'. We choose this name to emphasize the connection with the EQF.

We are thus saying goodbye to the concept of 'post-secondary' when it comes to courses that build on secondary education and in which various countries have tried in the past and also alongside the creation of the European Higher Education Area to create their own to shape the learning area. This was partly possible due to the use of the framework that fits the ISCED. Due to the international use of the EQF and therefore the NQFs, the time is ripe to adopt the use of its levels and the use of the term 'tertiary' is now expressly appropriate.

It means that qualifications that provide access to tertiary education fall under the secondary area. It is up to a country to determine how that area is further divided, partly taking into account the classification of courses and qualifications that are seen as belonging to the 'primary education area'.

So: Qualifications at levels 5 and above of the EQF fall under the 'Tertiary Education Area (TEA)'.
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### **7.2 Classification of the Tertiary Education Area (TEA) and type of qualifications**

The proposal is to make an explicit distinction between formal and non-formal qualifications. As indicated earlier, we mean that a formal qualification means that there is a form of management, control and involvement of the government at a national level. An important aspect of this is the way in which the internal and external systems for guaranteeing the quality of the qualifications themselves and of the providers. But we also look at everything that falls outside and how to deal with it.

#### **Formal**

The following two types of sub-areas for formal qualifications within the TEA are distinguished:

- Higher Education Area (HE Area / HEA)
- High Vocational-Professional Education Area (HVPE Area / HVPEA).

#### **Non-formal**

For the non-formal offer of qualifications within the TEA, we propose to use the following international name for the sub-area:

- Business-Personal Education and Training Area (BPET Area / BPETA).

This concerns all non-formal qualifications that can be linked to a level of the NQF and therefore to a level of the EQF.

#### **All other qualifications**

In addition, there are countless qualifications that do not fall under the concept of 'formal' and aren't or can't linked to a level of the NQF. It is clear that they all have their own value for individuals, companies, organizations, government plans and all kinds of target groups, but they derive this from different judgments. This can be done through a professional organization, an employers' association, an examination agency or a network of its providers.

We will not consider these qualifications here. The main reason is that we can and will use the EQF and the NQFs that have been accepted for all countries involved through the international EQF Advisory Board in which they are all represented. Moreover, in almost all cases these qualifications have a value that mainly applies nationally.

#### **International qualifications**

Then the so-called international qualifications remain for us. These are qualifications that are provided by their providers in several countries on the basis of an identical programme and there-

fore with (almost) the same learning outcomes. The main reason for this is to match jobs, professions, functions and activities that are comparable in those countries. Additional (professional) requirements may be requested per country, but the substantive matters are equivalent.

There is (yet) no European organization, a 'European Coordination Point', that offers the opportunity to link an international qualification directly to a level of the EQF. This would mean that this qualification would also automatically be linked to all NQFs, but this does not have to be the same level, a 'conversion' that is determined nationally. Such an ECP will also not investigate this, because of the time burden this entails, as well as the need to continuously monitor everything.

The consortium that manages an international qualification will therefore have to go through the required procedure in each country, in the current situation. Maybe there will be solution in the near future, knowing that some initiatives have been taken.

It may be possible that once there is more clarity around the Tertiary Education Area, further more general consultation will also take place about the positioning of the international qualifications.

### **7.2.1 Higher Education**

Higher Education (HE) refers to the formal offering of qualifications (cycles) that falls internationally under the EHEA and has subsequently been translated by each country into an NHEA.

If a country has a unitary system, with a single type of provider, it is therefore referred to as this NHEA, which involves formal qualifications that fall under the concept of Higher Education (HE).

If a country has a so-called binary system for the NHEA, it is subdivided into:

- Professional Higher Education (PHE)
- Academic Higher Education (AHE).

In all cases, the maximum of four formal cycles agreed within the EHEA are offered, depending on the choices a country has made and which institutions offer them. Within our proposals, these cycles always comply with the agreements made within the EHEA.

### **7.2.2 High Vocational-Professional Education**

In addition to the HEA, all other formal qualifications are included in – what we have proposed - the High Vocational-Professional Education Area. The institutions involved in this therefore provide qualifications that fall under the concept of 'High Vocational-Professional Education (HVPE – High VPE)'.  
These are qualifications that are linked to levels that can be traced back to levels 5 to 8 of the EQF and do not belong to an NHEA (and therefore not having a link with the EHEA).

This concept has been chosen because these qualifications can be build on secondary education, especially in a practical sense on VET. But there are also opportunities to use these qualifications to see how the labour market can be responded to at higher levels with clearly practically designed programs, often also using 'work-based learning'.

This means that they can also be 'variants' of what is offered within 'professional higher education'. To emphasize that this concerns levels 5 and higher, provided in parallel to an NHEA, often with a division into PHE and AHE, the combination of 'vocational' and 'professional' can be used internationally.

### ***The use of 'High'***

An introductory part of this document briefly discussed the use of 'high' in the concept of the HVPE Area. When it comes to 'Higher Education' it is clear that this description of that sector has become so entrenched that there is no possibility of moving away from 'higher', possibly implying that there are 'lower' qualifications.

Moreover, several countries have already joined in by offering national qualifications at level 5 and higher, formally and in parallel with national higher education. This was done by also talking about 'higher'. In order not to further sharpen the contrast with 'lower', a situation that is not really seen as convenient for many of the organizations involved, we opt for a form of ordering. This involves connecting to the higher levels of the EQF by just using 'high'.

### ***Difference between 'higher' and 'tertiary'***

A country is free to define its own national tertiary area. It happens that in that context certain qualifications are seen as 'higher education', without meeting all criteria agreed for the EHEA, especially when the English terms are used. It is therefore important to distinguish between 'higher education' and 'tertiary education'.

### ***Vocational and Professional...***

An important note in this situation is that in English a distinction can be made between the type of education, with vocational and professional, aimed at the labor market and part of 'the world of work'. So that is already anchored in the names.

But in many languages the distinction cannot be made and the national name for vocational and professional is the same. It may then be a useful option to add the concept of 'secondary' or 'tertiary' in the country itself. Of course, one can also use the English name in the national system, if there are no serious objections to this.

Providers of HVPE qualifications may include different legal entities. We will come back to that.

### **7.2.3 Types of HVPE qualifications (and about e.g. micro-credentials)**

Here we would like to discuss the further implementation of HVPE based on the fact that its qualifications are linked to an NQF (and therefore indirectly to the EQF). The EHEA can be seen as a reference.

Within the EHEA as it is now designed within the Bologna process, it is established that qualifications, i.e. cycles, are used, which have a size and study load based on a number of credits. That size is always a multiple of 30 and almost always of 60 credits. It is up to a country to use the available bandwidth for its own EHEA, on the condition that the final level of a cycle complies with the associated Dublin Descriptors.

An example is the Bachelor who can have 180 or 240 credits. This is partly due to the previous education that is shorter in certain countries than in other countries and then the length of the total learning path is decisive. The SCHE programme can be 90 to 120 credits, also in combination with, for example, the Bachelor as a first cycle.

When designing the EQF, nothing was formally determined about the size and study load in clock hours of the qualifications. What matters is that the final objectives and learning outcomes meet the EQF descriptors. These have their own characteristics, although in various countries they have been declared compatible with the Dublin Descriptors for the four cycles for levels 5 to 8.

This means that in practical terms it is not just about qualifications with a duration - so to speak - that is a multiple of half a year (a semester), full-time. All kinds of other designs are also possible.

### ***Starting point HVPE: full-time qualifications***

The proposal at this stage is to take full-time qualifications, linked to the levels of the NQF, as the basis for the HVPE area. This means that these are courses that use full semesters when it comes to courses for young people. This can increase recognizability and comparability. Naturally, such a course can also be designed for other target groups, part-time, with work-based learning or with flexible learning paths that are spread over a longer period of time. Agreements can also be made for this where appropriate, in view of 'lifelong learning'.

In addition, an proposal is needed to take this 'framework' as a starting point for further flexibility and detailing of the offering within the HVPE area, with qualifications that have a different study load. This will be further elaborated in a separate document.

### ***Micro-credentials***

It can also be noted that many countries, with proposals made for this in an international context, have and are being made to include so-called micro-credentials within an NHEA. This often concerns one's own interpretation of the positioning of the MC, namely being part of a formal training course, possibly slightly adapted to the target group. The complete training is therefore the 'macro level'. This means that credits can also be awarded to an MC where appropriate, with the accred-



itation of the formal training as a guarantee of quality. This will also be looked at for the HVPE area, in a specific document.

### **7.3 Formal and non-formal...**

In principle, an infinite number of qualifications can be linked to an NQF in a country - if the government makes this possible and the NQF is not only used for formal education and training, i.e. the qualifications for which a form of national control is applied.

It is then up to the same government to (soon) determine which qualifications and which providers require such formal training within the HVPE Area. This means that there must be a system within which these qualifications are determined and approved, especially if there is some form of government funding. This also applies an automatic system whereby the qualifications are classified into that NQF independently of the National Coordination Point for the NQF, as is also the case for the cycles in the NHEA.

What is discussed in this document applies in principle to formal training. But of course there are also non-formal courses that are classified at the same levels as formal courses and also have a comparable study load. However, they do not fall under the system that the government uses for quality assurance and must therefore receive their own treatment. We place them in the Business-Personal Education and Training (BPET) Area, as discussed later.

### **7.4 Especially levels 5 and 6 - affiliation with the NHEA**

We therefore propose to fix the HVPE Area for levels 5 and higher. As mentioned, full-time qualifications can be linked to this, as is the case with formal HE qualifications, normally using 'semesters' of 30 EC.

But looking at the developments in the past that have led to the formation of a sector that was given the name Higher VET and, above all, built on the VET sector in a practical way, it must be recognized that the supply on and around the levels 5 and 6 should be further developed within the Tertiary Education Area (TEA).

It must also be taken into account that the flow from these levels to the cycles of the National HEA is seen as strategically important in many countries and therefore deserves a formal approach. This means that, as a result, providers of HVPE at these levels 5 and 6 can, must and may conclude cooperation agreements with HE institutions. This may also apply to the flow from HE to HVPE, so vice versa.

An important aspect here is the progression from the HVPE Area at level 6 to the second cycle, i.e. the Master. Certainly in the PHE Area within the EHEA, if it exists in a country within a binary system, there are quite a few options for that. It also means that a government must consider whether it is logical to focus on transfer options from the HVPE Area at levels 5 and 6 to the NHEA, with clear and transparent agreements. This can prevent the creation of a third (sub-)sector in a country with a binary NHEA with qualifications at levels 7 and possibly also 8. If it is not necessary, such 'subdivision' should be prevented.

But if a country has a unitary NHEA, it can be seen whether level 7 is an interesting option to develop certain types of training within the HVPE Area. This means that this area actually functions as the PHE Area as found within a binary system.

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## **8 Use of instruments and common agreements**

Agreements have been made within the EHEA on common instruments such as:

- a. Use of the term Cycle
- b. Use of the term Degree
- c. Dublin Descriptors for the levels
- d. Use of the terms Professional and Academic (within a binary system)
- e. European Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance, internal and external
- f. Basing the study load on the use of ECTS, and therefore credits
- g. Use of the diploma supplement, with a specific format.

This also explicitly demarcates the NHEAs. National authorities will without hesitation integrate these instruments into legislation and all associated regulations.

However, it does mean that there are opportunities to converse these instruments, so to speak, into instruments for other types of formal qualifications.

This means that the own characteristics of, for example, the HVPE Area can be preserved, with their own status and not as 'a derivative' of the EHEA.

A short list can already be drawn up in the same order as you think of the HVPE Area. But as already indicated, we will elaborate on this further in the other documents:

- a. Use of the concept 'Level' as an anchor point
- b. Use of the term 'diploma'
- c. EQF descriptors for levels 5 and above
- d. Use of the Vocational-Professional combination within the same sector
- e. HVPE Standards and Guidelines to be determined for quality assurance, internal and external
- f. Basing the study load on the use of HVPE credits, via a system yet to be determined
- g. Use of a diploma supplement, with a format that can be determined further.

It is of course advisable to look at the HE instruments as much as possible for inspiration (and not imitation), in order to optimize the progression and transfer to other qualifications, if there is added value for the student.

## **9 Institutions as providers of tertiary qualifications**

We propose a classification when it comes to the whole of institutions and providers of tertiary qualifications and which therefore concerns the international context. The classification can serve as a reference for a national classification, especially if there is international cooperation and communication. But it is up to the country itself to see how this can affect national institutions and organizations.

It does mean that if institutions in a country want to occupy and use a place (status) in the international context, a choice must be made based on the proposed classification. This is partly about making the type of institution clearly visible, to immediately show clearly to all target groups where this provider can be positioned within the formal systems.

It is also up to a country itself to introduce further subdivision in the national context, just as a binary system for higher education is simply a national choice. There may be reason for further international subdivision in the coming years, including for the VPEA, but our proposal is to keep it simple at first to prevent further misunderstandings and improper use of terms, concepts and names.

We will then start working on a proposal for the classification when it comes to the institutions and international names within the European Tertiary Education Area.

### **9.1 HE – Higher Education and the Short Cycle**

We first start with institutions that at least offer the 'first cycle' in the formal setting ('Bachelor'). It is up to a country to determine which institutions may also provide the 'second cycle' ('Master'), as well as the 'third cycle' (PhD, Doctorate).

Subsequently, the 'short cycle' does not entail a national obligation to be offered, although it fully meets the same criteria within the EHEA. But if it is offered, it is up to the country to determine what the formal position of the SCHE is within the NHEA and who the provider is.

There are two options:

- The SCHE is offered by an HE institution that also provides at least the first cycle, in some connection with it.
- The SCHE is (also) offered by HE institutions that only (in the formal context, as an institution with its own entity) formally offer this short cycle and, on the basis of national agreements, collaborate with the HEIs that offer at least the first cycle.

With the first option, it should be noted that a Higher Education Institution may not offer the SCHE itself, but have it provided by another institution on the basis of issuing a 'license'. This means that the other institution is not the formal owner of it and can never be seen as a HEI on this basis. The program, examination, quality assurance and issuing the diploma always remain in the hands of the license provider.

### **Short Cycle and an international common name: Associate**

We will come back to this separately later, but in order to be able to fully provide the names for higher education institutions, here is our proposal to give the Short Cycle as an international name: 'Associate'.

This means that only HEIs that formally offer the SCHE may use that name for this degree (cycle) and conversely that if no name Associate is used, it is not formally a HEI. This therefore increases transparency.

### **Providers with at least the first cycle - and names**

Here we make a proposal for the names of institutions that are allowed to provide higher education, i.e. a HEI. We are giving a new, umbrella name to the institutions that provide professional higher education within a binary system.

- If there is a unitary system:
  - *University (U)*
- If there is a binary system:
  - *University of Professional Education and Research (UPER) – for institutions and providers of Professional Higher Education*
  - *University (U) – for institutions and providers of Academic Higher Education*

It should be noted that the choice of the 'name' UPER is based on the growth in the use of all kinds of names within the EHEA, without there being a broad consensus regarding a specific name. Before the Bologna Process started, the name Polytechnic was mainly in vogue and there are still countries that rely on this for the national name.

An important new name is that of the University of Applied Sciences, a proposal that emerged from a European project with a number of countries that concluded in 2007. But there are also countries and regions that indicate that the most commonly used additions to the formal degrees in higher education are: 'of Science' and 'of Arts'. This would, as it were, forget an important part of the EHEA. A most recent attempt to overcome this is the use of the name 'Applied Higher Education Institution (AHEI)'. But this is also a relatively vague name, which does not make it clear that some research is also being done.

Because many countries, but also at European level, are striving for a fully-fledged positioning in a binary system for providers of PHE and AHE, it is believed that the term 'University' should appear in both names. So when the proposal for the UAS emerged in 2007 and no initiative was taken within the Bologna process to achieve some form of harmonization - partly due to the fact that ministers must be prepared to do so - more and more countries gradually adopted the name embraces UAS without further consultation in order to 'communicate' with each other.

It subsequently turned out that there are countries whose legislation also makes it possible to use names such as University of Fine Arts, University of Health Care, University for Music and Theater and the like. The principle is that the addition refers to the professional field.

To avoid further discussions, our proposal is to now grab the momentum by using a more general and umbrella name, i.e. 'University of Professional Education and Research (UPER)'. The term 'professional' refers to the positioning in the EHEA.

It is also possible to work with 'additional names', which can also be stated on the diplomas and in the diploma supplements. To give an example:

University of Professional Education and Research  
Institution for Fine Arts

It is of course up to each country to determine which national name is used in the national language if the English name is not also in use nationally, possibly to be used in all kinds of networks. But we hope that a discussion about this will be started within the Bologna process in the not too distant future. Until a decision has been made, we will use 'UPER'.

### **Institutions having just only the Short Cycle HE**

As indicated above, the standard situation for HEIs is that at least the first cycle, the Bachelor, is provided. That has been the case from the beginning of the Bologna Process. However, with the

formal inclusion of the SCHE in the EHEA in 2018, all countries have had to further consider its position.

The countries that had already included the SCHE in the NHEA before 2018 did so in connection with the first cycle. This was because of the 2005 SCHE 'definition' that was embraced during an initial discussion within the Bologna Process: 'linked to - or - within the first cycle'.

From 2018 onwards, this also meant a reason for a reorientation of the position for those countries. For example, the SCHE can (also) be embedded in the NHEA separately from the Bachelor. There were (in addition to abolishing it again, but that is not happening) two options for the SCHE: leave it where it already was, i.e. at the HEIs (possibly with a more individual positioning and bundling) or remove it there and place it in an independent higher education institution.

The countries that had not yet given the SCHE any place in their NHEA could also consider what the best option was at that time. Of course, one could also continue to not offer it (several countries have also taken that decision as such, for all kinds of reasons). But it also provided the options that existing providers had: placing it in a HEI or providing a new type of HEI for providing the SCHE.

In connection with this, it must of course always be considered how those in possession of a formal SCHE training diploma can continue studying for the Bachelor's degree. The Dublin Descriptors state that the HEIs must organize their programs in such a way that progression to a higher level is possible. In the constructions mentioned above, scenarios can be devised for this and underlying cooperation agreements can be drawn up.

It appears that there is a development underway to bundle the range of qualifications for the SCHE, i.e. the 'Associate' if we can start using that name in an international context. This can be done in a country by having an independent institution for this purpose, i.e. with its own entity. In that case, the proposal is to use the following international name:

- *Associate College.*

It is like having within the NHEA with a binary system of a University of Professional Education and Research (UPER) in the formal context of the EHEA.

It is therefore immediately clear to all target groups that it is a provider of the formal Short Cycle HE and something like this can only be welcomed very much.

But it may well be that the government does not want this after all, having its own institution for the formal training courses that fall under the SCHE. This also means that within the HEI the range of SCHE qualifications is bundled in a certain way. But then there is no situation that can be regarded as structural. It is up to this HEI to use a specific name for the relevant part (department, academy, etc.) where appropriate if it is believed that this is important in communication. Such a component can be designed in its own region or with its own location.

This construction can also be used for collaboration with, for example, VET Colleges, with further agreements about the provision of the program. Specific licenses or contracts can be used.

There will therefore be scenarios where a country has simply not introduced the SCHE and may not do so in the short term, despite all international developments. It may mean that growth to level 5 within the tertiary system from, for example, the VET sector or in other ways must be recognized by the HEIs and that agreements can be made with the relevant providers where relevant.

***Associate College (AC) advancement at a unitary system in an NHEA***

It may therefore be the case at some point that the following situation exists in a country with a unitary system for higher education:

- University – for the first, second and third cycle
- Associate College – for the short cycle

We continue to formally speak of a unitary system since that division fits the offering of at least the first cycle.

But a government may then have the option of formally offering an AC the opportunity to provide education that meets the criteria for the first cycle. This is possible because of the pressure from employers not to force Associate degree owners to move on to the first cycle of the University in

the event of advancement. A 'practically completed' first cycle can therefore be developed in line with the Associate.

As such, this happens parallel to the University. The result is that, as it were, a University of Professional Education and Research is added to the NHEA, through a growth process.

However, the government then has two choices:

- It is actually decided to convert an AC to a UPER, for the short and first cycle, based on agreements about cooperation with the Universities and the flow from the first cycle to the second cycle.  
This has created a binary system, with specific agreements.
- Converting an AC to an UPER is done for part of the existing range of ACs. This means that AC, UPER and University coexist, but still in a formal sense within a binary system.

We would like to emphasize that these are possible future scenarios. But we can also note that in a country like Canada this movement was initiated a number of years ago, under pressure from the labour market. Employers, in particular, wanted to focus on the more practical interpretation of higher education. So, it is not unrealistic to consider these types of changes and developments, especially as a government.

### **9.2 HVPE – High Vocational-Professional Education and levels**

Within the HVPE Area, levels 5 to 8 can be offered, depending on the choices made in a country. This often concerns levels 5 and 6. The following classification can be considered:

- Offering only HVPE-5
- Offering HVPE-5 and HVPE-6.

Only offering HVPE-6 in the formal context is of course an option, but we do not include it in this document.

### **9.3 HVPE and the name of the provider**

It is important to choose a clearly distinguishable name for the type of institution that offers HVPE. Our proposal is:

- *HVPE Institute*

This also makes a clear distinction between the concept of VET College, for levels up to and including 4 (see why below) and, for example, the Associate College within the EHEA.

### **9.4 Position of a HVPE Institute**

Various forms of positioning can be distinguished for a HVPE Institute. It is up to a country itself to determine which form best suits the existing education system and how the target groups can best benefit from it. We give the options here, with a brief explanation.

1. The HVPE Institute has an independent legal entity and as such is included in the national education system within tertiary education, with a form of autonomous action and with its own administration.
2. The HVPE Institute does have its own status within tertiary education in a country, with its own regulations that result from this, but the HVPE Institute is formally housed in a legal entity with a VET College, with an umbrella board for both components. This offers the opportunity to act under the management of that entity within the frameworks for VET up to and including level 4 and also for HVPE for levels 5 and higher.

If there are already providers for VET up to and including level 5 (and possibly higher), they should in principle consider whether such an 'internal' division is possible and what advantages this provides, including for international projects and the budgets.

Naturally, all kinds of forms of collaboration are possible in which a HVPE Institute is involved. This is possible with higher education providers or specifically an Associate College. This often involves connecting to each other's qualifications and shaping progression to a higher level.

Both classifications offer the opportunity to determine how qualifications with a certain orientation are embedded in the whole. It can therefore be more practical or theoretical, partly in view of the progression to a higher level, and specifically to a higher education course.

### **9.5 HVPE Institute and types of qualifications**

The first thought was and is of course that a HVPE Institute is there to offer formal qualifications that are based - in the full-time form - on a semester and a year format. A training course lasts, for example, 2 years. We therefore use that design in this document as a basis for the proposals.

But it is also clearly visible that there is a need to offer parts of these courses. By this we do not mean the qualifications that are linked to an NQF in the non-formal context, because they have their own status and providers, mainly found in the private market for training, i.e. at the BPET (see below). Of course, formal education institutions may be involved, but we want to make the distinction clear.

Within a HVPE Institute, parts of formal qualifications can therefore be offered, also as short independent courses. They can also be narrow parts, thinking about what is going on with micro-credentials. We will discuss this in a separate document in this series, with a number of proposals, specifically for the offer at levels 5 and 6.

Naturally, this also plays a role within the EHEA, with plans for a specific approach for micro-credentials. We will also pay attention to this in that document.

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### **10 Business-Personal Education and Training (BPET) – non-formal qualifications**

As mentioned earlier, another area within the TEA can also be reserved for non-formal training and qualifications that derive their status from being linked to a level of the NQF. This means that this area is explicitly determined and organized nationally.

We propose to refer to this area in the international context as 'Business-Personal Education and Training (BPET).

This mainly concerns qualifications that are provided in the private context by all kinds of providers (possibly also with a connection with providers of formal education). They are strongly linked to specific goals such as educating workers, providing targeted and profession-related training, in-company training and other forms of education that help people shape a career or personal development.

In order to properly delineate the whole, BPET has therefore opted for a link to an NQF and thus indirectly to the EQF. The other non-formal forms of education, training and education have their own dynamics and characteristics. These cannot be captured in a single format, partly because it is often impossible to determine what the level is, how the quality can be controlled formally and externally and the providers can be found in all shapes and sizes in a country.

This will be discussed further in another document, so as not to hinder discussions about the formal classification. But the fact that further consideration is necessary has to do with the further introduction of the micro-credentials that fall under the non-formal system.

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### **11 Level 5 Area**

All analyzes show that qualifications at level 5 of the EQF, including the SCHE (which in some countries is not linked to the NQF, but is only part of the NHEA), can play a key role in shaping the start-up phase of the tertiary education area. It is also the phase in which bridges can be built between secondary education and tertiary education, especially when it comes to the VET sector.

In case that a country chooses not to offer a SCHE within the NHEA, in a formal sense and based on the applicable criteria for the EHEA, it must be considered how 'the gap' can be filled. This can be done by offering HVPE, but also with other types of training that can be linked to an NQF, at level 5. But cooperation agreements are always necessary between the providers and the HEIs. This can certainly be complicated, to be able to fill in the continuous learning paths periodically.

That is why CHAIN5, founded for this purpose in 2013, has put a lot of energy in recent years into seeing how the 'National Level 5 Area' is developing in various countries. In connection with this, it is important to consider to what extent more attention to the design of a European 'Level 5 Area' can contribute to further fleshing out and updating those NL5As. Use can be made of the experiences gained in other countries, with good examples.

Naturally, this European L5A is in line with what has been and will be agreed for the entire Tertiary Education Area (TEA), as discussed and proposed in the previous texts. It is therefore not the intention to develop a completely unique 'strategy' for the L5A, but because this allows bridges to be built between the various (sub)sectors in secondary and tertiary education, it seems wise to continue to work on this.

### 12 Degrees and names.... how about that for HVPE?

From the start, the EHEA has opted to use the term 'cycle' to indicate the level. This was obvious at the time given that the EQF did not yet exist.

The concept of 'first cycle' was used for the first level. It was already known at that time that there were courses that last one and a half to two years, but these were ignored at that time. When it was decided to do something about this in 2005, a solution had to be found for the appropriate concept. 'Zero Cycle' was not an option and as a compromise, 'short cycle' was chosen, although the 'first cycle' was not seen as the 'long cycle' or 'full cycle'.

In line with all this, it has been decided to use the term 'degree' for the four cycles. This is a fairly exclusive situation, meaning that only higher education can and may grant degrees to those who have completed a formal education.

Although it is not based on a general decision by the countries involved, it has been accepted that international common names for the degrees circulate. These are the Bachelor, Master and PhD (Doctorate) and, if one decides, the Associate.

The question now is whether there is a need to use comparable names for the HVPE Area. If so, how?

We will discuss this separately in another document in this series.

## PART III The TEA as a whole and the Level 5 Area

### 13 Schemes: Tertiary Education Area and Level 5 Area

TERTIARY EDUCATION AREA						
Level EQF			European Higher Education Area			Cycle
			Unitary	Binary		
8	BPET	HVPE	HE	PHE	AHE	Third
7						Second
6						First
5						Short

LEVEL 5 AREA					
Level EQF			European Higher Education Area		Cycle
5	BPET	VPE	Unitary – HE	Binary – PHE – AHE	Short

We will explain all this further in subsequent documents.