

## **The structure of the High Vocational-Professional Education (HVPE) Area**

### **Ideas for international common names and terms**

#### **Use of micro-credentials in the EL5A**

### **Part 8**

#### **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. 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.

#### **1 Introduction**

Within the European Tertiary Education Area we have made a division in terms of sectors within which qualifications at levels 5 and higher are offered. This includes two sectors that focus on providing formal training:

- Higher Education – based on the European Higher Education Area
- High Vocational-Professional Education – the HVPE Area, as we call it.

Specific attention is also requested for the so-called European Level 5 Area that runs straight through these two sectors, but also through the sector for non-formal qualifications called Personal-Business Education and Training.

Here are the corresponding diagrams.

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

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

## 2 Micro-Credentials

This document discusses an aspect of providing education and training that has generated a lot of attention in recent years. This involves the use of 'micro-credentials' (MCs). The European Commission has also noticed this and that is why Brussels has taken the initiative to draw up ten criteria for the use of MCs. But at the same time, Cedefop, among others, has been asked to conduct research into the way in which this is dealt with in Europe, especially nationally. They look at institutions, companies and organizations that provide training, and ask what they do with it and why.

This is a remarkable approach because only now are many countries looking for what should be understood by the MCs and how they can be given a place within the education system. The link to the NQF is also a point of attention. It appears that the European Commission's criteria are mainly seen as a restrictive framework, given the requirements that must be imposed on the institutions and organizations that must, may or want to issue them and the persons, companies and other stakeholders who use them.

### *Uncertainty and approach to higher education*

Recent research by Cedefop also shows that there is actually a situation in which 'everyone' has simply gotten to work on it and in their own unique way. Higher education, within the EHEA, indicates that the MCs are nothing more than parts of the formal qualifications. This makes sense if the concept is taken literally, namely a unit that includes a number of credits.

But institutions also see it as an option to develop additional units that form a variant of the regular training units and can therefore be offered on a tailor-made basis. This allows, for example, publicly funded institutions to also undertake private activities, a situation that is seen in many countries as a supplement to current options.

### *Idea behind a MC*

It is not the intention to provide a complete treatise on 'the MC' in this document. There is sufficient documentation available about this, with all kinds of definitions that in one way or another fit what the organizations involved think. We want to keep it as simple as possible in this phase, so that during the intended process for the VPE Area it can be seen what is most useful to arrive at a use of the MC that is considered an enrichment of it.

### *MC and HVPE Area*

In part 4 of this series we discussed making it possible for the VPE Area to offer derivative programs in addition to formal training. It also stated that a HVPE Institute can also market parts of these programs, under certain conditions. That is why we are joining in here.

In this review we opt for two designs of an MC, based on the range of formal training courses available. In the near future, it will also be examined what this means for the non-formal qualifications that fall under Business-Personal Education and Training, since by definition these can already consist of programs with a limited scope and an appropriate study load and linked to an NQF.

- **Unit-Certificate – for within the HVPE Area**

It concerns a formal unit, with its own type of certificate, to be issued to an individual. It mentions the institution, the relevant course, its position in the program and the date on which the certificate is issued. The holder of the certificate can save it (digitally) and insert it at any time he or she wishes in a specific context where this is considered relevant. This could be for a job, a training course or another situation in which demonstration of certain learning outcomes is necessary.

- **Skills-Certificate – for outside the HVPE Area**

This is a statement held by an individual regarding having acquired certain competencies (skills, knowledge) in a situation that is linked to specific training received outside formal education. This also includes courses, workshops, in-company training, projects, work within a specific context, short programs from professional organizations, etc.

The point is that it is possible for the person concerned to receive a certificate after having completed such training that describes as clearly as possible what has been learned. Naturally, matters relating to the organization involved and the date of issue are mentioned.

Such a training statement is kept by the person concerned (digitally) and can be used in a specific situation.

### **Comments...**

We would like to make the following comments:

- Both types of MCs can be used when following a new, subsequent course, if it may lead to exemptions or a shortening of the programme. It is always the examination committee or a comparable committee that makes a judgment on this.
- It is emphatically important that the owner of such an MC must realize that its 'value' may decrease over time or even become 'nil'. This of course depends on the type of learning outcomes and competencies linked to the MC.
- A specific procedure can be followed to determine the (current) value of such an MC. The design of this procedure is up to the receiving institution, organization, company or other party, i.e. to which the holder of the MC must submit. Additional information can of course be requested to clarify how the MC 'works out'. It is up to that person to deliver it.
- It is not always clear what the bandwidth is when it comes to the study load in clock hours of an MC from the HVPE Area. With a fairly extensive MC, it may be the case that not all of the associated competencies cover a certain part of a new course or training to be followed. It is up to the receiving institution to determine what can lead to exemptions.
- We are talking here about a certificate that is linked to units of a qualification, an 'education unit'. It is currently the case that for a qualification with a specific name, each institution itself, in a country or in an international collaboration, chooses the division into educational units. The learning outcomes of the qualification, of a specific phase of the program and the design are leading. This means that, as it were, each 'unit certificate' is unique, linked to the institution that provides this proof. The receiving training provider will therefore always have to analyze its value, leading to possible exemptions.

### **3 MCs and the HVPE Area – in general – a choice within the process**

It actually seems impossible to us at this stage to determine what a widely accepted and useful MC is in an international context, what the criteria are and how it can be used in the best possible way. All kinds of research is still being done and new proposals are constantly emerging. The MC must then match what is intended for the HVPE Area.

Especially for the EL5A, which is, as it were, a connection area for the VET Sector, the EHEA and the HVPE Area, it is necessary to keep an eye on what the most usable format is.

In short, for the time being we will stick to the two formats mentioned above, so with the 'Unit Certificate' as proof of having completed an educational unit, and the 'Skills Certificate'.

### **4 At the end...**

There is considerable pressure on national education systems to become more flexible. But this means that a structure that has often been used as such for decades and within which publicly funded and private providers of formal qualifications function, must be adapted. This can lead to

additions but also to shifts, new forms of education and the redesign of learning paths. The options for institutions can also be expanded, but sometimes also limited. This means that a new policy affects the interests of existing and newly established institutions.

A HVPE Area represents an expansion within the Tertiary Education Area, but also an overlap with the other sectors. With our proposals we are already committed to more flexibility when it comes to formal training and variants thereof. The proposals for micro-credentials also attempt to provide evidence of having acquired competencies, skills and other skills. This is possible in the formal and non-formal context, but in an 'informal' setting. It is precisely this last approach that makes it very difficult to make all this into a whole, usable and deployable everywhere, as it were.

We will therefore follow developments with great interest in the near future. If there are opportunities to integrate the MC into our process, we will definitely take them.

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The topics within this series are:

1. Classification of tertiary education, the positioning of the HVPEA 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 approach for SCHE
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...