

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

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

#### **Why having the EHEA and the HVPEA next to each other...**

### **Part 9**

#### **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**

In this concluding document we will once again address the question of why so much effort should be made to reach international agreements on a European Vocational-Professional Education Area and, in connection with this, look at the positioning of a European Level 5 Area. At the beginning of this series we stated that it was an ambitious goal and this was only confirmed during the preparation of all documents.

The main goal is to reach agreement within the international context with all parties involved, working in all countries and across borders, on English names for common concepts and terms to be used internationally. To immediately give another example of why, i.e. what can happen when a national design is used for an explanation in English:

In Denmark there are three types of institutions within higher education. One of these is the 'Business Academy'. These institutions are involved in offering 'Academy profession programs, normally awarded after 2 years and they are equivalent to the first 2 years of a bachelor degree. They are oriented towards specific professions or job functions. Most programs are awarded after 120 ECTS. There are approximately 27 academy profession programs. Students who have passed an academy profession program can continue in a top-up bachelor program. Most of the academy profession programs are offered at Business Academies.

These are texts that can be misunderstood if not read carefully. So it says 'academy' and not 'academic' and also 'profession' and not 'professional'. This apparently concerns the Short Cycle Higher Education, because of the two years and the 120 EC (ECTS is not possible because this is the abbreviation of the system itself).

Subsequently, the term Business Academy is used worldwide for institutes that work for large companies or for professional organizations.

But the constructions are quite clear and fine. All in all, it fits in with level 5, the SCHE, as the opportunity to focus explicitly on the labour market. It is the 'SCHE linked to the Bachelor' type, based on national agreements.

If we were to 'rewrite' the italic texts based on our ideas, this could be a proposal (and also adjust a few 'sensitive' texts, since they are standalone programmes):

*... Associate's programmes, normally awarded after 2 years and they are comparable with the first 2 years of a bachelor's degree. They are oriented towards specific professions or job functions. Most programmes are awarded after 120 EC. There are approximately 27 Associate's programmes. Students who have passed such a programme can continue in a top-up bachelor programme.  
Most of the Associate's programmes are offered at Associate Colleges.*

It is a considerable adjustment, but for the record it should be stated again that it is not about prescribing national names and concepts. That is up to the country itself.

But it cannot be denied that there are countries that immediately after the start of the EHEA chose to use English names, terms and concepts in the national context. Yes, then they have to get to work, so to speak. They get something in return, namely international recognition.

## **2 Why starting up this process?**

After the first years of the Bologna Process, it became apparent that the focus for the EHEA was mainly on the positioning of the three cycles with the international names: Bachelor, Master and Doctoral.

It turned out that in many countries there were also courses with a length of one and a half to two years, but it was unclear how they should be referred to, including higher education or something beyond that, given the character and the providers.

### **Two types for short HE programmes**

There was then a discussion about these courses, which were also offered, where appropriate, by the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), but in one of the following ways:

- A program within the bachelor's degree programme, often seen as the first phase with the option to continue with the second phase. The programme did provide a certificate or diploma, but not a degree. This was seen as a 'programme within the first cycle, the Bachelor';
- An independent course within a HEI with its own status and diploma, in such a way that progression to the second phase of the Bachelor's programme could be made possible. This was seen as a 'programme linked to the first cycle, the Bachelor'.

### **Short cycle**

In 2005 it was decided to attach a name to these short higher education courses, namely 'Short Cycle', in full 'Short Cycle Higher Education (SCHE)'. It was also announced that further research was needed to see how the SCHE could be further incorporated into the EHEA. That did happen, but not on a large scale.

### ***Other short programmes***

But there were also many short courses at that time that could not be accommodated. However, a government could do that, in its own national way. But it was important that these courses could not be given higher education status. There was also no international process set in motion to create a clear sector or area for some of those qualifications. The attention of the authorities therefore mainly focused on higher education.

### ***EQF***

A further impetus for thinking about the position of all kinds of qualifications was the introduction of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) in 2008. This gave every government the opportunity to draw up its own NQF. But this also meant deciding which types of qualifications could be linked to a level. The formal education programmes automatically qualified for this. But not every country decided to allow this to happen for non-formal qualifications as well, or only for a certain part of them.

However, this also meant that qualifications that from then on could be classified as level 5 or higher, regardless of higher education, could still be considered 'formal' in a certain way. In this context, formal can be understood as meaning that the government is involved in determining the qualifications and all kinds of associated procedures and frameworks.

### ***Higher VET and Post-Secondary***

The name 'Higher VET' was used for these qualifications, which were mainly seen as a continuation of what was and is offered in the VET sector. But in certain countries and elsewhere in the world people talked and still talk about 'post-secondary education'. This has to do with the fact that there are institutions that build on all sectors within secondary education, including 'general education', and the use of the framework that is used for all kinds of statistics, the ISCED. However, in Europe it was still about being Higher VET, so it can clearly be seen as expanding the VET sector to higher levels.

It should also be realized that around 2013 the Ministers for Higher Education within the EHEA decided to make the highest entry level for higher education level 4. This meant that everything at 5 and higher, as it were, 'automatically' became an area for 'higher qualifications'. This also gave additional reason to the use of the term Higher VET.

### ***2018: Short Cycle in the EHEA***

After much discussion and consultation, the Higher Education Ministers decided in 2018 to formally include the Short Cycle in the EHEA. However, it was stated that the countries cannot be obliged to offer the SCHE, in a unitary or binary system.

Furthermore, no agreement was made about the international common name and degree. This was mainly due to the position of a number of countries not to deviate from the original agreements. But it did mean that there was room for a discussion about whether level 5 of the EQF should be completed. This provided an impetus for Higher VET.

### ***2023: NQF's: all 'approved'***

After the introduction of the EQF, all countries that were interested in it, such as the countries of Europe, started setting up their NQF. That is why they have set up an international advisory board to assess whether mutual recognition of the level is guaranteed. This process has been completed now, in 2023.

This means that the process we intend for the VPE Area can be given a clear basis due to the condition that we speak of qualifications that are linked to the NQF in a country and therefore indirectly to the EQF.

## **3 Grouping**

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

- Higher Education – based on the European Higher Education Area
- High Vocational-Professional Education.

Here again is the corresponding diagram. BPET stands for non-formal qualifications, with Business-Personal Education and Training.

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

#### 4 Equivalence

Now that everything seems to have been arranged, with the EHEA and the EQF, it is important for the reputation of tertiary education to strive for clear and demonstrable equality of the sectors belonging to it. In recent years, the EHEA has acquired its own status, linked to the concept of 'higher education'. It is certainly not wise to oppose the EHEA when achieving a comparable status for the HVPE Area. But it is a kind of duality that is being sought:

- Optimally design the HVPE Area to use its own strengths
- Effective collaboration with the EHEA to achieve coordination around all kinds of learning lines.

#### *Higher educated: strategy of a government*

In many countries it can be seen that many young people (and their parents) aspire to obtain a degree in higher education, with a view to shaping and pursuing a career. It turns out that this pursuit is also supported by the positions occupied by those holding a university degree, and the income generated by it. In recent decades, many governments have also focused on increasing percentages of highly educated people, partly inspired by agreements that were once made within Europe to allow more than 50% of all generations to achieve such a status.

#### *A shift towards 'vocational training' is necessary*

But it now appears that this means that there are shortages in other sectors of the labor market and therefore fewer young people who want to be trained for this. The authorities are now eagerly looking for a different approach to this. This should ensure a structural shift from more academically but mainly professionally oriented courses, at all levels. The expectation is that the demand for these graduates, also in connection with 'lifelong learning', will continue to exist substantially.

One of the challenges is to make it clear to young people that learning paths leading to a level in the HVPE Area, via the VET sector but also via 'general education', offer equal opportunities compared to 'higher education'. This requires a sophisticated approach, together with the professional field, the institutions, politicians and other policymakers.

An international approach can certainly help with this. Searching together for scenarios, ways of completing learning paths, emphasizing internationalization as a supporting instrument and using each other's expertise and experiences can above all ensure an embedding in the national context that other sectors in national education can benefit from. The educational system can also benefit.

In short, the process we have in mind will be a matter of working together. There are countries where a lot of things are already happening to offer qualifications that we can classify under the VPE Area in our proposal. If the governments there are prepared to make a clear contribution in the coming years, many countries will simply join in. Good examples always make people follow well.

#### 5 The future, nearby...

To conclude this series and at the start of discussions about achieving the intended process, it can be stated without doubt that there is sufficient 'food for thought' on the various tables and can then be 'served'. In the coming months, a further plan of action will first be drawn up, after which it will be determined which CHAIN5 partners will contribute to which parts.

The ambition expressed in document 1 and in the introduction to this document regarding this initiative has been expressly translated into proposals in the other parts. The goals have been made visible. It will undoubtedly result in a complex approach. But all of that is definitely worth it.

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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...