



**Level 5 in Higher Education and Higher VET**  
***In the EU... and the Netherlands – an example of flexibility...  
and some other issues...***

**1 Introduction**

This document broadly discusses a number of issues in the Netherlands surrounding the offering of level 5 qualifications, with regard to ensuring a flexible approach, but taking into account what is going on in the business community. As the project also shows, there is more and more dynamism within the field, in such a way that educational institutions must take this into account. This is primarily about maintaining their own programmes, based on that dynamic situation, but also about the consequences for the positioning of them in learning paths.

In the Netherlands, formal courses at level 5 are included in higher professional education. They therefore form a link between courses at levels 4 and 6, but also between the Vocational Education and Training (VET) and Higher Education sectors.

In the following paragraphs we will explain a number of matters. We will first look in general at level 5 in the Netherlands, after a brief outline of what is going on internationally - so also interesting for the partners in the project. We then provide a list of points of interest that generally apply to situations in countries where level 5 has not yet or hardly been developed, and that can be used by government and educational institutions for all kinds of discussions. It is also appropriate to make a number of statements on this point. We then conclude with a consideration of the tension for courses at level 5, i.e. - as mentioned above - how guarding one's own identity can entail all kinds of actions.

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## **2 Level 5 in EU and the Netherlands**

This section first outlines what level 5 entails internationally, and then explains how this is regulated in the Netherlands - including for training courses on 'building construction'.

### **2.1 Level 5 and the EU**

We use the framework for qualifications that exists since 2008, the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). Each country now has a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) in its own way. In any case, formal training is linked to this, i.e. the qualifications that are managed, controlled and often funded in a certain way by the government. This is also possible for other qualifications, but not every country has yet created a clear procedure for this. This is important for the future, also to guarantee the quality of certificates, micro-credentials and other forms of non-formal training.

For level 5, we are including the following options in the developments, as the two most important types of courses that can be offered at level 5 in a country:

- In Higher Education: Short Cycle Higher Education (SCHE)
- In line with the VET sector in a country: Higher VET (HVET).

The SCHE does not yet have an international common name as a degree, such as for the Bachelor and Master. This is a point of discussion within Europe.

At Higher VET, a country can now simply choose its own English name, partly due to the lack of an 'international process' for this, as is the case for higher education with the so-called Bologna process.

#### **Types of institutions**

Furthermore, the SCHE can and may be offered by different institutions. A few examples:

- By a University (if there is a so-called unitary system in a country)
- By a University and/or College (in a so-called binary system)
- An institution that only offers the SCHE (but should be regarded as such as an institution for higher education).

In the latter case, that institution may also be affiliated with other institutions such as a VET College, but its status must be guaranteed.

#### **Possible situations at 5**

Each country can decide for itself how the 'national level 5 area' is organized. No international agreements have been made for this. This makes international cooperation, exchanges of students and teachers, common programs and building networks quite difficult. This will need to be further investigated in the coming years. The European Commission's aim for a European Education Area (i.e. including all sectors) can be used in this regard.

These are options when it comes to formal training at 5:

- There is SCHE / no Higher VET
- No SCHE / there is Higher VET
- There is SCHE / and there is Higher VET
- No SCHE / no Higher VET.

Each of these options has its own approach, with all kinds of regulations regarding the design of learning paths, from 4 to 5 and to 6, and everything that is possible. But it is important to look at the role of 'the national level 5 area' as the 'linking pin' between 4 and 6 and between VET and HE.

Based on this, the following matters apply:

- From VET at level 4 to a qualification at level 5 or level 6
- From Higher VET and SCHE to level 6.

### **2.2 In the Netherlands...**

In the Netherlands, level 5 was already introduced in 2006, within higher professional education. There is a binary system, which means that the SCHE cannot be found at the universities. This makes the further development of the SCHE a lot easier, in order to achieve a practical interpretation and further design. The collaboration with VET Colleges and the business community is also a lot more effective, so as not to get into all kinds of discussions about academic competencies and forms of research. The latter does happen, but it is quite practice-oriented.

### **Name**

In 2006, the Associate degree (Ad) was chosen to tie in with the naming in countries such as the US, Canada, Flanders, Australia, etc. It is of course hoped that if a common name within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) will be chosen, this will be 'Associate'. The degrees are: Associate, Bachelor, Master and Doctorate (PhD).

### **Length**

The training for the Ad degree lasts 2 years and consists of 120 credits. The Ad therefore complies with the agreements made within Europe (the Bologna process), which apply to the Bachelor and Master. Within higher professional education, the Bachelor's degree programme lasts 4 years, with 240 credits. This means that a student with a VET diploma at level 4 can choose from those parallel courses and learning pathways.

### **In VET**

In the Netherlands there is no formal qualification at level 5 that falls under VET. This was a conscious choice by the government to avoid confusion. VET students with a level 4 diploma would like to go to higher education to obtain a degree. Naturally, all kinds of non-formal qualifications can be offered that, as it were, build on the VET sector. These qualifications are linked to the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), including at level 5 and possibly higher. Students who have obtained certificates for this can in many cases receive exemptions if they want to study at a University of Applied Sciences, for an Associate or a Bachelor.

### **Collaboration**

Regional cooperation in the development, offering and updating of these courses for the Associate degree (Ad) by the universities of applied sciences and the VET colleges is of great importance in the Netherlands. This makes the flow and further connections better and smoother.

In a formal sense, parts of the courses can be provided at the location of a VET College. Teachers, supervisors, coordinators and managers are also deployed on both sides.

### **To the Bachelor**

In a formal sense, holders of the Ad diploma can progress to a course for the Bachelor degree. In general, this means following a two-year program. This means that the learning path to the Bachelor via the Ad takes four years, as long as the so-called undivided route to obtain the Bachelor degree. The choice of which route to take is up to the person going to higher education.

## **3 What is going on in general, in the provision of level 5**

In the development of level 5 in the Netherlands, leading to the Associate degree in higher education, clear attention has been paid to the consequences for the entire education system. Implementing a new type of training cannot simply be done. Students make different choices and follow new learning paths. Educational institutions must adjust their policies. Partnerships need to be further developed. There are many aspects that deserve attention.

Here is a list of things that are used within CHAIN5 in situations where a country is considering what the best approach is, with the SCHE but especially Higher VET. In the latter case, in consultation with those involved, we examine what is already happening, what the plans are, how other types of qualifications are already being used at level 5 and how all this can be applied in the further development of the system. One approach is that an analysis takes place in a group and a comparison is made with what has happened or is still happening at level 5 in the country where a member of that group comes from.

Here are a few things to include in an investigation. See them as signals, because of course more needs to be considered...

1. How are the current VET-4 courses offered and what are the special aspects that indicate the possibility of introducing level 5....
2. Are there subjects in the training that can also be found at level 5 in your own country...
3. Which topics would be suitable for level 5, can be found with us and also suit that other country...
4. What stands out in the collaboration with the professional field, also when it comes to guaranteeing quality and level...
5. Why do VET students opt for the Bachelor's programme - without level 5 - and how do they prepare for it...

6. Are electives possible at level 4, possibly expandable to level 5...
7. Are certificates also offered to workers, non-formal...
8. How are training courses generally adjusted each year, on the basis of which...
9. Is there a professional field committee for VET training and how do employers view possible training at level 5...
10. Do teachers also work in practice and notice that higher levels are necessary...
11. Is there an institutional strategy for the design and embedding of the training in the education system - also taking into account the regulations of the government and the national agency for qualifications - and is level 5 also taken into account...

#### **4 Statements for level 5**

It may be a form of provocation in this context, but if VET Colleges in a country believe that qualifications at level 5 are also necessary, they can and should hold discussions at all kinds of levels. Here are a number of statements that can be included, as examples, to indicate the direction of those consultations. Here too, if a country wants to continue working on a 'national level 5 area', careful consideration must be given to what the best approach is for students, employers, employees and of course the institutions.

Here are a few examples of statements to get the discussions going...

1. It is necessary that every country has levels 4, 5 and 6 for training - including in construction - within the formal system, in order to be able to create continuous learning pathways...
2. It is a good thing if level 5 is included in higher education and not in VET...
3. If it turns out that a level 4 training cannot cover all competencies, partly in view of the dynamics in the field, a VET College can develop short training courses at level 5, on the basis that the certificates obtained can be used for training in a at a later stage, follow a course at level 5 or level 6...
4. It is recommended to investigate whether internationally recognized certificates can be developed for certain competencies and therefore specific units at level 5...
5. As a public funded educational institution, it is important to have contacts with private institutions, Business Academies and organizations that train workers on behalf of a sector for specific certificates...

#### **5 Dynamics related to level 5**

What has also become apparent over the years in the Netherlands is that providing a level 5 course, in this case the SCHE, i.e. the Associate degree, means that the program must be reviewed every year. It may be an independent entity, but the Ad is always part of all kinds of learning paths with other courses. This means that close attention must be paid to what is happening 'elsewhere' in the education system.

#### **Constructions...**

It is quite specific to the Netherlands, but a training course can offer three types of 'facilities'. This may have to do with the target groups:

- Full-time for young people
- Part-time for workers and adults
- Dual for young people who are a bit older and can and want to combine study and work.

This dynamic is especially at play when working full-time. These students would like to immediately move on to the next level and then look for a job. But the experiences gained with these training courses can be used anywhere.'

#### **Three 'stakeholders' to keep in mind**

When designing a course such as SCHE in the Netherlands, it is important to consider in advance how its most important 'environments' can be taken into account. There is no general model for this, partly because the situation is simply different in every country. But here we provide a few brief suggestions for each environment.

##### **1. Progression to level 6 – Bachelor**

In the Dutch situation, it is possible to use the Ad diploma to progress to a bachelor's program and follow an additional program there, based on what has been done in that Ad programme. But they both have their own position, management and direction – as well as their own accreditation and

an internal quality assurance system. This means that at a certain point the programs may fit together and connect with each other, but then they can have to be updated if they make changes on both sides.

If long-term agreements have been made to 'hold on' to each other, representation from both sides will have to be met every year to ensure that both programs are still organized in such a way that students can follow a 'study able' whole. This requires a lot of work from everyone involved, but it is inherent to what is considered necessary within a flexible education system.

### **2. Enrolment from level 4 – and... the VET sector**

Many training courses within the VET sector offer excellent opportunities to find a job and start a career. But at the same time, the labour market, including in 'building construction', requires people with skills and competencies at a higher level. This can be done by going to work with a level 4 education and then following all kinds of non-formal training in addition to the job.

But then it turns out that young people would first like to obtain a higher education diploma, for example at level 5, and thus be able to get a better job, with a higher salary and things like that. On this basis, if it is clear that this option is obvious for a substantial proportion of VET students, agreements can be made between the institutions involved about the design of the progression. This can be done by using elective subjects and by offering extra subjects. But an internship in the VET training can also include courses that match the way in which a SCHE training at level 5 is structured.

Consultations will also have to take place every year to monitor developments. A joint committee with representatives of the regional business community can also be used for advice.

### **3. Collaboration with the world of work – learning outcomes and competences**

But it is very important to guarantee relevance for the labour market, nationally and certainly regionally. This is a guarantee for graduates who want to have a job based on a level 5 education.

Structures will therefore be needed within which the training program has, maintains and can guarantee contact with a clear representation of the business community. Things to take with you:

- There is an advisory board with representatives from relevant companies...
- There are guest lessons from experts who know the labour market well and also work there...
- The internships should be used to notice new developments...
- The graduation assignments provide new insights into the dynamics...
- Certificates can be included in the program, for short courses that can also be followed by employees...
- Where appropriate, we can collaborate with the so-called Business Academies of large companies, employers' organizations, professional associations and the like...
- Practical assignments involve employees...
- Collaboration with small and medium sized companies can be embedded in regional networks, to see whether students can carry out certain assignments there...
- Management regularly consults with HRM departments of large companies...
- There is a well-functioning alumni policy, with alumni tracking...

### **6 Level 5... and the future...**

It is becoming increasingly clear, both in Europe and in other countries, that being able to offer courses at level 5 is an extension of the possibilities to accommodate the dynamics of the labour market, nationally and internationally. This means that in countries where the policy on this point is not yet clear, the VET Colleges and higher education institutions can also 'sound the alarm' to the government. Naturally, the business community is an important partner in this.

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## **Annexes**

Two annexes have been included. Annex A contains the outcome of a study into how countries within the European Higher Education Area have or have not introduced the SCHE at level 5 within higher education. Any plans for Higher VET are also mentioned. So it shows the dynamics around level 5. Annex B contains the recommendations of a working group within the Bologna Process when it comes to the correct use of the SCHE, with the criteria to be used.

## Annex A

### OVERVIEW - SHORT CYCLE HIGHER EDUCATION (members EHEA) – at EQF level 5 (and plans for having Higher VET)

Country	SCHE	VET / Comments / Plans
Albania	Diplomë Profesionale (2 years) = Professional Diploma 120 credits	Also: Certifikatë Profesionale (1 year – also level 5) Professional Certificate
Andorra	Diploma professional avançat (DPA) = Professional advanced Diploma 120 credits	
Armenia		VET: Diploma on Middle Professional Vocational Education with the level of qualification “Specialist” No plans for SCHE
Austria		Diplom (Kolleg): VET qualification No plans for SCHE
Azerbaijan		Orta ixtisas təhsili (Secondary special education) Plans for SCHE
Belgium – Flanders	Gegradueerde (associate degree) / Graduaatsopleiding 90-120 credits	
Bosnia and Herzegovina		
Bulgaria		VET – level 4 (highest level) No plans for SCHE
Croatia	Stručni pristupnik / stručna pristupnica = 120 credits (or more)	Professional title: Pristupnik
Cyprus	5c Higher Certificates and Diplomas (3 years) (Ανώτερο Δίπλωμα (3 χρόνια)) 180 credits	5a Post-Secondary Certificates and Diplomas (1 year) (Πιστοποιητικό (1 χρόνος)), 5b Post-Secondary Certificates and Diplomas (2 years) (Δίπλωμα (2 χρόνια))
Czech Republic	Diplomovaný specialista (DiS.)	
Denmark	Erhvervsakademigrad / Academy Profession Degree Akademigrad/Academy Profession Degree	
Estonia		No plans for SCHE a formal Level 5 higher education qualification can be recognised as part of higher education studies under the conditions and procedures set by the higher education institution.
Finland		Level 5 in VET
France	Diplôme universitaire de technologie (DUT) Brevet de technicien supérieur (BTS)	

	Diplôme d'études universitaires scientifiques et techniques (DEUST)	
Georgia	Diplom (Kolleg)	
Germany		No plans for SCHE
Greece		Plans for SCHE
Holy See	Higher Certificate	
Hungary	Felsőfokú szakképzettség (vocational higher education qualification obtained on completion of a vocational higher education programme -felsőoktatási szakképzés) 120 credits or more	VET: Advanced-level vocational qualification (full, add-on, technician) ( <i>Emelt szintű szakképesítés, szakképesítés-ráépülés, technikus szakképzettség</i> )
Iceland		
Ireland	Higher Certificate	
Italy		
Kazakhstan		
Latvia	HE: Diploma of short-cycle professional higher education (short-cycle professional higher education) ( <i>Īsā cikla profesionālās augstākās izglītības un profesionālās kvalifikācijas diploms (īsā cikla profesionālās augstākās izglītība)</i> ) 120-180 credits	VET: Certificate of professional qualification ( <i>profesionālās kvalifikācijas apliecība</i> ) (no students yet)
Liechtenstein		
Lithuania	Trumposios studijos	
Luxembourg	Brevet de technicien supérieur (BTS)	
Malta	Undergraduate Certificate Undergraduate Diploma Undergraduate Higher Diploma 30-60-90 credits	
Moldova	Diploma de studii profesionale, învățământul profesional tehnic postsecundar nonterțiar (Diploma of professional studies, post-secondary non-tertiary technical and vocational education and training)	
Monaco		
Montenegro		
the Netherlands	Associate degree 120 credits or more	
North Macedonia	No information	Only VET at 5
Norway		Two years program – part of a Bachelor's program - offered by University Colleges (HE) = Level 6.1 of the NQF and level 6 of the EQF No degree connected to 6.1
Poland	Certified Specialist (Świadectwo dyplomowanego specjalisty) Certified Specialist, technologist (Świadectwo dyplomowanego specjalisty technologa) 90 credits or more	
Portugal	Diploma de Técnico Superior Profissional (CTESP)	

Romania		Certificat de calificare profesională nivel 5 Plans for SCHE
San Marino		No level 5 qualifications in a formal way but Level 5 qualification can be obtained via accreditation of prior working experiences.
Serbia		
Slovakia		Diplomovaný špecialista DiS. (post-secondary, non-university professional education) - not part of higher education in Slovakia, is not counted toward a higher education degree (only included informatively, since it may be easily confused with the Bachelor level)
Slovenia	Višja strokovna izobrazba / Short-cycle higher vocational degree	
Spain	Técnico Superior de Formación Profesional Técnico Superior de Artes Plásticas y Diseño Técnico Deportivo Superior	
Sweden		The Higher Education Diploma (Högskoleexamen) is at EQF-/SeQF level 6 = 120 credits HVE at level 5 and 6
Switzerland		High VPET at higher levels
Turkiye	Önlisans (Associate's Degree)	
Ukraine	Молодший бакалавр	
United Kingdom (England / Wales)	Diploma of Higher Education (DipHE) Higher National Diploma (HND) Foundation degree (FD)	
United Kingdom (Northern Ireland)	Diploma of Higher Education (DipHE) Higher National Diploma (HND) Foundation degree	
United Kingdom (Scotland)	Diploma of Higher Education (DipHE) Higher National Diploma (HND)	



## **Annex B**

### **Recommendations for the BFUG (Bologna Process)**

Following the results of survey and discussions among the Working Group of the Bologna Process, the recommendations were prepared. The major points of recommendations on the short-cycle qualifications are outlined below; their order is not intentional.

**Access to short-cycle studies**

The countries considering the introduction of short-cycle qualifications need to set appropriate entry requirements, i.e., secondary education qualifications that provide access to higher education in the country in question.

**Duration and/or volume of study programmes (e.g., ECTS credits)**

Volume of short-cycle study programmes should be expressed in ECTS credits. Countries, introducing or developing the short-cycle qualifications should follow the provisions of the Paris Communiqué that the short-cycle qualifications comprise 90-120 ECTS credits.

**Access to further studies (i.e., existing bridges to Bachelor's studies)**

The countries planning to introduce short-cycle qualifications should ensure strong pathways to further higher education, especially to first-cycle studies, including validation practices, exemptions and credit transfers.

**EQF or QF-EHEA level**

QF level of short-cycle qualifications should correspond to EQF level 5 or QF-EHEA short-cycle to ensure their comparability and international recognition.

**Quality assurance according to the principles of ESG**

Higher education quality assurance procedures and ESG principles should apply to short-cycle qualifications.

**Differentiation between short-cycle qualifications and micro-credentials**

When introducing short-cycle qualifications, the state should clearly define short-cycle qualifications to distinguish them from micro-credentials and/or smaller learning experiences.

**Recognition of the short-cycle qualifications**

Countries planning to introduce short-cycle qualifications should comply with the Lisbon Recognition Convention (1997) and its subsidiary texts, to ensure fair recognition of short-cycle qualifications.

**Automatic recognition**

The possibility of applying automatic recognition for short cycle qualifications should be further explored.