

## **The structure of the High Vocational-Professional Education (HVPE) Area Ideas for international common names and terms**

*From Level 5 to Level 6*

**Part 3c  
January 2025**

### **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 document of the series we briefly discuss how holders of a level 5 diploma can progress to level 6 and specifically to the First Cycle of an NHEA. This also concerns the institution's acceptance of level 6 diplomas for those who have completed a level 5 programme. That diploma may have been obtained in someone's own country, but also elsewhere in the world. In this document we go through some of developments and scenarios.

### **2 Automatic recognition**

A factor in this is that internationally and certainly within Europe, possibilities are being explored for the countries and therefore governments involved to mutually establish frameworks for a form of automatic recognition. This is especially the case if someone wants to follow a programme or course at a certain level and applies for admission on the basis of a diploma at the lower level. It could also be a lateral step, i.e. at the same level, but this will then be ignored for now.

### **2.1 Automatic...**

The term 'automatic' is used somewhat strangely in this case. It would suggest that someone can simply start with that next study and that some kind of additional program can be offered. That is not the intention, we think. It would be nice if the following could be agreed within Europe, based on the 'Lisbon agreements (1997), formulated in very general terms:

- An institution offers a person the opportunity to register for a course at a certain level;
- In the national context, this can be included by the government within the appropriate regulations;
- In the international context, this is possible if in the country where the diplomas at the same level are comparable to each other in the countries involved.

It means that they agree with each other that national rights to advancement in another country will be respected.

### **2.2 Additional requirements**

This includes that the receiving institution will in any case investigate whether the diploma someone has justifies going through an admission procedure. It is then determined whether the chosen course or programme also means that additional requirements must be met.

These will be announced to the prospective student, together with information about how the requirements can be met prior to the start of the course or programme.

There may also be an opportunity to meet one or more of those requirements during the first period of the study.

## **3 Role of the EHEA and NQFs**

In any case, two situations can be distinguished that should be taken into account in all of this.

### **3.1 EHEA**

The starting point within the EHEA, a result of the Bologna process, is that people mutually recognize each other's degrees and the associated levels. For example, a Bachelor in country A offers the opportunity to register for a Master in country B. Just as mentioned above, a registration procedure is then started.

But it is quite possible that a country does deviate from this, for all kinds of reasons. This has to do with the fact that education is a national responsibility.

### **3.2 NQF and EQF**

With the EQF at the center, countries can compare their own national qualifications. But the responsibility also lies with those countries themselves when it comes to 'credential evaluation'.

But if this approach is used for 'mutual recognition', it not only has consequences for those who want to work in another country with a diploma, but also for the ability to continue their studies. In country C, the rights are different than in countries A and B. If someone wants to study at level 6 in country C from country A or country B, there is no other option than to request an intake - and the organization who carries out the diploma comparison, to request advice. But conversely, it can be beneficial, and so it can lead to remarkable situations.

It is a scenario that will be further explored in the coming years, knowing that all countries in the EU have formally linked their NQF to the EQF. It is therefore possible that the EQF level will become leading when it comes to the mutual recognition of a qualification.

## **4 From 5 to 6 within higher education**

Because the Short Cycle does not have to be a mandatory cycle in a country, progression with a SCHE diploma is still a clearly exploitable topic. If country A does not have the SCHE mentioned in the law and country B does, it must be clear what the options are for the student involved. It also plays a role in whether or not a country has a binary system for higher education, given the type of institutions that have a certain offer at level 6, i.e. for the first cycle.

It can be expected that within the agreements for the EHEA, the doors will in any case be opened to each other. This should also be possible if a country formally considers several types of courses as SCHE and the institutions fall under the law for higher education.

## **5 From HVPE-5 to HE-6**

A situation that will certainly be examined in the near future is how countries deal with the progression from a formal and therefore recognized programme such as HVPE-5 to the Bachelor (first cycle) - within a unitary or binary system. Recent research has been conducted into what level 5 is available in the EHEA countries, in HE or in HVPE ('Higher VET'), and this shows that the whole is still unclear.

Agreements can be made in a country itself, also by the government. But things become much more difficult across national borders. People do not know what is offered in other countries and how the level and quality are determined and guaranteed.

We want to explicitly include all of this in the process for the HVPE Area. The better the instruments within the Tertiary Education Area are coordinated, the more transparent it will become.

## **6 Learning paths within the HVPE Area around levels 5 and 6**

Much can be said about the choices that holders of a HVET-5 diploma can make, but within the intended process, explicit attention will be paid to the learning paths from 5 to 6, formal and non-formal.

The international approach will also be taken into account. This is certainly important because for the HVPE Area we rely heavily on the use of the NQF and therefore the EQF. If courses and programmes are virtually the same in terms of content, they should in principle have the same EQF level in every country.

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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
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...