

Response on 'Pathways to Professions: Measuring country practices in professional tertiary education' – 19/10/21

This document provides our feedback on the OECD report looking at the position of professional tertiary education in Europe and several other countries. We do this also on the basis of the questions that were asked during the webinar - and then on all kinds of subjects, with comments. This involves taking notes on an ongoing investigation, which may be used for activities in the coming months in the context of drawing up the final report.

We are of course prepared to provide further information and to explain the comments. We also look forward to the session on the research planned for the CHAIN5 Annual Conference to be held on March 10-11, 2022 in Oslo.

We use two parts for this response. So first we will deal with the questions that also appeared in the report, also posed to the participants in the seminar. We then give our opinion quite extensively on the basic principles for the research, taking into account the terms used to describe the education system around levels 5 and above of the EQF and also the ISCED, but also looking at level 4 of the ISCED. We believe that it is necessary to arrive at a simple and transparent design of this part of the system, in the international context – leaving it to the countries themselves to link their own education system to it.

A Research OECD and the three most important issues and questions

During the webinar, three issues (questions) were raised regarding the research – also appearing in the report, but formulated slightly differently. The participants in the webinar were then asked to give their opinion.

We list these matters here, to add our caveats.

First issue / question

1. *A three-way distinction between programmes that prepare for one occupation (e.g. paramedic), prepare for an occupational sector (e.g. business administration) or have a general, discipline-based focus (e.g. history, physics). The proposed terminology was professional, professionally-oriented and pure respectively.*

- In our opinion, the proposal focuses too much on details of the relevant qualifications and courses. It becomes too complicated if an inventory is asked for one of the three characteristics.
- The question is whether the answerer to the questions, if research is carried out, is able to determine which answer should be given.
- It is much better to look at the type of education and training, the provider and its status and to indicate the category based on that.

Type of education and training:

In our opinion, three possibilities can be distinguished:

1. Higher education, belonging to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)
2. Higher Vocational-Professional Education, now mainly referred to as Higher VET, not yet with its own sector or area
3. Business Education and Training, offering all kinds of business-oriented training courses.

Provider:

Three types of providers can therefore be identified, in general terms – and again, in the international context:

1. Higher Education Institutions, which can be found in a unitary system with Universities and in a binary system with Universities and Universities of Applied Sciences / Polytechnics / University Colleges...
2. Colleges, sometimes also referred to as Further Education Colleges, without a breakdown in how they target audiences, i.e. not unitary or binary

3. Private institutions, Business Academies, and other providers of training aimed at the professional field, the world of work, companies, and workers

- *Status*

There are then roughly two options for indicating the status:

1. Formal education, under some form of government control – applicable to HE and HVPE/-HVET
2. Non-formal Education, under a form of control by organizations outside the government, in view of the importance and positioning of the relevant training – i.e. Business Education and Training.

If we look at the question that has been asked on this basis, i.e. what we think of the classification, we would like to propose the following:

- An unitary system for higher education, i.e. only with Universities, implies an 'academic/professional' orientation. It is up to the institution to determine the relationship between the two components of the orientation – and how to 'mix' them.
- With a binary system for higher education, there are Universities that have an 'academic' orientation, and Universities of Applied Sciences / Polytechnics (not speaking of 'non-Universities') with a 'professional' orientation. A choice will still have to be made when it comes to the name of this type of HEIs, but the name UAS is on the rise.
- In both cases, the characterization should not be refined, with terms such as 'professionally-oriented' and 'pure'. In higher education, one can speak of narrow and broad programs, depending on the part of the world of work that is covered, but based on the so-called Dublin Descriptors within the EHEA, there is always a minimum width when it comes to the competences and learning outcomes required within a position in the labor market.

We are also not going to make a further subdivision when it comes to the degrees (cycles) that a HEI offers. This can also only be done with the Short Cycle, within an independent organization, but also a department (part) of an organization that also offers VET qualifications or is linked to a Business Academy. In that case, that department is in itself a legal entity that falls under the regulations for the national higher education area.

For the record, this concerns the international description, a use of concepts that serve as a kind of guideline. Countries can deviate from this themselves, with the risk that communication across national borders can be difficult. That is a choice of a country itself, if it wants to operate in an international context.

- There is no binary system as in higher education for the supply of qualifications and training that fall under the HVPE (Higher VET). There are also no international common names for the institutions yet when it comes to the international context. If more shape is given to the European Education Area (EEA) in the coming years, a process will necessarily start for HVPE at the same time. But a possible type is 'HVPE College'.
- It is obvious to call the orientation 'Vocational/Professional' for the qualifications that fall under the HVPE sector. It is up to the institutions to determine the mix in which the components 'vocational', i.e. strongly focused on practice, and 'professional', the more broad approach to a function, are used. The extent to which an HVPE qualification is aimed at advancement to the labor market or a possible continuation thereafter in a higher education cycle, i.e. with a HEI, may also play a role.
- Incidentally, we can refer, without attaching a judgment to it, to the situation in the US with Community Colleges (which do fall under higher education) where two additions to the Associate degree are used: 'of Arts/Sciences' as this allows progression to a Bachelor's degree from a University, and 'of Applied Arts/Sciences' if the focus is on the labor market.

For the qualifications that come under non-formal education and thereby the training that can be found in all kinds of forms in all countries, it is clear that it is not necessary to attach an additional concept to them when it comes to orientation. It concerns a part of the system from level 5, which we regard as 'tertiary' in its entirety, which is already very complex in every country, let alone that agreements can be made about it in the international context. A good example is the discussion

about the 'micro-credentials' that have and will continue to have their own 'discussion' path in each country.

- As we show in part 2, there are possibilities to do something with the non-formal qualifications. Think of international business training, which strives for international recognition. But they are always focused on functions, on the practical environment and the work that is performed.
- The proposal is to drop this under '*occupational*'. The reason for this is that non-formal education is mainly focused on functions (jobs) and then on matching the training with the work – and then often as part of it, also to be seen as further training and specializing for a certain task. A higher level can certainly be reached with this, but in a limited sense. This would require a full diploma.

This means that we could start using the following classification for a scheme that deals with the qualifications that fall under 'tertiary' (and which we will return to in part 2).

Type		Concept
Higher Education	Unitary	Academic/Professional
	Binary	Academic Professional
HVPE		Vocational/Professional
BET		Occupational

Second issue / question

2. *Use as necessary criteria “explicit objective to prepare for a specific profession or occupational sector”, and as sufficient but not necessary criteria “explicit labelling” and “links to occupational regulations”.*

- The point here is therefore that there has to be a guideline for all countries to be able for positioning certain courses in a scheme, model or system. And this therefore involves a positioning in the international setting – a reference via a scheme in which all types of qualifications occur as well as possible.
- This study therefore looked at qualifications (courses, programs, training trajectories) that can be seen within that generally applicable and useful scheme as 'professional', as tertiary education. As already indicated, we think that the wrong approach has been chosen by seeing 'tertiary' too much as 'higher' and not properly linking 'professional' to the entire system (schematic, model) for the qualifications at level 5 and higher (from the EQF and also the ISCED).
- We believe that when it comes to the international positioning of programs that focus on the professional field (the world of work, the labor market, the professional environment), it is sufficient to use the terms as they are indicated in the table above. We don't think further details are necessary, apart from a number of criteria that each country can imagine that apply to this type of training.
- In the system for formal qualifications at level 5 and above, there is always a broad range of training. Even if the program focuses on a certain part of the labor market, there will always be units that have to do with competences that make a program a (more general) track at a higher level than 5. The regulations in each country will also be different when it comes to, for example, the use of 'labelling' and 'occupational regulations'. Those things do happen, but those links cannot be seen as belonging to international standards.
- It is best to stick to a global description for each type of qualification in the scheme for level 5 and above, i.e. labeled 'tertiary', as discussed in question 1.
- If countries want to make agreements with each other about cooperation and recognizing each other's systems, an additional study can be carried out. It starts with the observation that certain qualifications are given the same characterization by the different countries in the scheme, after which they examine in more detail what the national systems have in common.
- For higher education, within the EHEA, this has been done successful so far. Yet there is still no complete transparent approach, with many differences between countries. With the focus on the EEA, more can be done for the HVPE sector in order to increase transparency between countries. The sector BET (Business Education and Training) can also be put into action, but

this involves very different parts of the education system in all countries. A start may be made by looking at the role of the NQFs and linking specific qualifications, such as international trajectories (diplomas and certificates).

Third issue/question

3. *Allow for the criteria to be applied either at the level of provider institutions or programmes, and develop an agreed classification of detailed fields of study based on the ISCED-F framework.*

- Our goal as CHAIN5 is (thus) to start on the side of the international context for training, so by looking at a schedule for the qualifications at levels 5 and above, to be seen all together as 'tertiary'.
- Each country can then indicate, on the basis of a number of criteria, which are not too detailed, which of the formally offered qualifications fall under HE or HVPE (HVET).
- After that, we have to consider together, i.e. with those involved, which goals can be linked to further detailing when it comes to the characteristics of education and training. We understand that international comparisons for mutual recognition are already made between a number of countries, also looking for what the courses and qualifications have in common.
- The question is whether this leads to a better understanding among the institutions themselves. In other words, are tertiary education providers (qualifications, programs) waiting for all the data to be published, or not...
- The national governments do want to have certain comparative material. However, the set-up, design and content of formal training courses is 100% a national issue. It is best to look at what is happening in other countries, but then taking over or adjusting things is often not an obvious choice.
- At the European level, people would like to know what is going on. But even then the question is what to do with the information.
- Our idea is therefore to first arrive at a global schedule, and then consider what further is needed for governments, national organizations and the institutions.
- It also seems to us that much more is to be done in international partnerships. Think of the Centers of Vocational Excellence, the European Universities and the projects that are carried out under Erasmus+ (although the results may be used more in a broader context...).
- In short, we would only like to address the third question if the general framework is clear and accepted by all countries.

These questions therefore arise from the report with the following recommendations.

1. Refer to 'pure' rather than 'academic' programmes and define an additional category of 'professionally-oriented' programmes.
2. Develop definitions based on a set of necessary and sufficient criteria, as well as some supporting indicators, drawing on the answers collected through the Data collection on professional tertiary education.
3. Allow for the agreed set of criteria to be applied either at the level of provider institutions or programmes.
Develop an agreed classification of detailed fields of study based on the ISCED-F framework to help reporting in countries without clear institutional or programmatic distinctions

B The scheme (framework) for qualifications at level 5 and higher

1. In general... looking at the aim of the survey

In our opinion, the goal is to strive for transparency with regard to the positioning of qualifications located at levels 5 and above. It revolves around an international context (schedule, table, scheme, framework), with international names and concepts and associated classifications. If possible, every country – anywhere in the world – can refer to this by indicating where its own programs can be positioned within a national system in that international context.

This creates a situation that is comparable to the EQF and the NQFs, with a kind of 'translation table', using the descriptors. The national names simply remain in place and that table can be used and supplied in the international cooperation and associated communication.

1.a

What also reappears in the research is that it starts by looking at the national systems, the classifications used for them, and the names associated with qualifications and training courses at their own national level. This yields a number of tables about the situation regarding the supply of the study programs that are being examined, which clearly show what is already available and what kind of institutions are involved. The national organization that supplies the data is responsible for what is included in those tables.

However, if an attempt is made to see whether there are comparable systems, with common elements and corresponding criteria, things quickly can go wrong. After all, it is the same national organization that uses its own data for this purpose, and these are certainly not internationally comparable or can be categorized in a clear manner. It is precisely for this reason that people have been talking – and complaining – for years about the lack of clarity and transparency about what is happening at levels 5 and above, with the request to finally arrive at a transparent framework that can be used in the international context.

1.b

It is for this reason that we believe that it is good to carry out an inventory such as the one that is now taking place, but that it is more convenient to provide a schedule (a model, a system) in advance based on what has been already become clear in terms of usability in recent years. This lists the types of qualifications, within a structured overview.

A number of concrete criteria can also be mentioned for these types, not yet in detail but in such a way that each country can determine in a recognizable way what is the best match of a national qualification with the types distinguished in the scheme.

This means that in the study the countries, i.e. the organizations involved, are asked to indicate for a qualification, with its own national name, to which type within that scheme it is considered to belong.

1.c

It is of course already the case that, certainly in higher education, names in their own language are no longer used in many countries. This means that it concerns a Bachelor or a Master, so that no 'translation' into an international, commonly accepted name is no longer necessary.

Incidentally, the use of these names is purely based on mutual understanding, and thus the acceptance of such a name. There is no European regulation for this. The Bologna Process also talks about 'cycles'. The Bachelor is therefore to be seen as the 'first cycle', part of the basic agreements.

In principle, we must assume that if a country uses the name Bachelor, Master and Doctorate, this means that the underlying programs belong to the EHEA and meet the criteria that are set. This could be further investigated in a follow-up study...

1.d

A specific case occurs with the so-called Short Cycle Higher Education (SCHE). This cycle (degree you could say) was accepted in 2018 by the ministers of the countries within the EHEA, as part of the QF-EHEA.

There is no international common name, not yet. There is no proposal on the table at the BFUG about this yet, despite a move that we as CHAIN5 already made in 2018, namely for the use of Associate. The reason is that the BFUG cannot and may not take decisions on this point, apart from having the SCHE. It is up to the member countries to make agreements about this.

Therefore, if a schedule is drawn up for level 5 and higher, this proposal can be included, in order to find out what counter-arguments may be put forward.

1.e

In line with the previous point, it should be stated that the lack of an internationally accepted name for the SCHE leads to a lack of clarity in various cases. In a country, a level 5 education may exist and it may be decided to put a different 'label' on it, but slightly different, such as 'Short Cycle Vocational Education' or 'Short Cycle Tertiary Education'. This should normally mean that the training does not fall under the QF-EHEA, but, for example, under Higher VET.

In addition, there are situations where such a program is offered by a Higher Education Institute, i.e. a formal provider of higher education. This can mean that the training is, as it were, 'piggy-backing' on the status of the HEI.

The confusion that this creates and continues to perpetuate must be avoided. This can be done by drawing up, as already mentioned, a scheme for level 5 and higher and linking certain types of qualifications to it in a transparent manner.

1.f

Of course, it is up to the countries themselves to determine what they see in the national context as higher education and thus as parts of the national higher education area. All kinds of national laws and regulations are linked to this, to make clear to the target groups in their own country what the status is.

But being part of a national higher education area does not automatically mean that a qualification in the international context falls under the EHEA. This also applies to the international status of the provider of that qualification.

It is therefore important, as indicated, to have a clear, transparent and workable schedule for the qualifications at 5 and above, as an international starting point for countries that are willing to link their national system to an internationally accepted model.

1.g

Having such a transparent scheme is certainly relevant for international projects and partnerships with institutions in an international context.

1.h

A special aspect that does play a part in all this, but which can be adapted internationally, is the general name for the type of education that focuses strongly on the labor market, so that is relevant for the business community. In the national language, this can mean that a difference can be made between the levels. For levels up to and including 4, it can be 'vocational' and from level 5 it can be 'professional', in the European context. In addition, 'technical' is also used, but that name has a somewhat different connotation within Europe, i.e. being aimed at 'engineering and technique'.

An example of the same name for all levels in VET and HE can be found in the Netherlands, namely having 'beroepsonderwijs' for secondary up to and including 4, higher from 5. But many countries are facing this dilemma.

Therefore, the proposal is to use 'Vocational' in the international setting for VET up to and including 4, 'Professional' from 5 on in countries with a binary system in higher education – and 'Vocational-Professional' for the qualifications from 5 that build on VET and do not belong to HE. We will come back to this.

1.i

There are qualifications provided by institutions that are funded by the government on the basis of certain criteria, but there are also providers that act privately. There may be a mix of them, but in general a clear distinction can be made between public funded and private.

This will not affect the formal qualifications in terms of level, content and quality. Its monitoring is mainly in the hands of the government or related organizations. For the non-formal trajectories, this will concern the private supply, partly in view of the fact that it concerns the demand from the business community and workers for training, leading to a form of customization. Control is also usually in the hands of organizations that are not related to the government, and that can therefore use their own standards and independent frameworks – nationally and internationally.

With the arrival of the EQF and thus of the NQFs, some things are changing, certainly if countries incorporate the NQF in one way or another in legislation and regulations. The European consultation of the National Coordination Points is relevant here as they work together in a network and also assess and approve the linking of an NQF to the EQF.

It is currently not necessary to make a separate subdivision into government-funded and private institutions in the overviews. It is possible that if there is an agreement on the scheme for the entire tertiary supply, this distribution can be examined in a follow-up study to see how it plays a role.

1.j

The research concerns examining what is going on with regard to 'professional tertiary education' in a particular country. So that is a form, a degree, a program. In addition, the courses are offered in all kinds of variants: full-time, part-time, dual, work-based learning, online, distance learning, apprenticeships and all kinds of mixtures of these. It is interesting to investigate this, if only to find out how the world of work is really involved in such a design.

Here too, there is first a transparent classification for the tertiary supply, with a number of sectors, before examining the form and deployment of the business community.

1.k

In addition to formal and informal education and training, there is also the informal character of education. The results of this can be taken into account by a person when training is started, via a procedure in which the acquired competences are assessed, possibly leading to exemptions. That is what is understood by Recognition of Prior Learning. A non-formal diploma or certificate can also be submitted for formal training.

Again, it can be argued that there is no specific place in the tertiary system for RPL and other forms and procedures that are used.

1.l

The so-called micro-credentials are on the rise. This means that in addition to the training and full programs that lead to certificates and diplomas, there are small units that have a certain value in themselves. The use in a specific situation plays an important role in this, but it is not yet really clear what the innovative character of a MC is. They can be used in the RPL procedure, if training is started.

For higher education, it seems that MCs will be used, but that, for various reasons, this must involve parts and units of formal education. In the private market, 'units' and 'modules' of the programs offered have been offered for a long time, especially when they are stacked over a somewhat longer period of time, training can be completed.

The recommendation is not to do anything now with components of courses within the tertiary subject, even if providers still issue 'declarations and certificates' for having passed part of a course, if it can be linked to a civil effect. This option is not suitable for an internationally transparent system.

2. Criteria and the determination of the type

There has been looked at the provision in a country of qualifications that meet certain criteria. A further check will still have to be carried out on the validity of what the countries and organization themselves have provided. It is known that English terms in a national language can have a different meaning and vice versa. In addition, it is possible that a certain type of training in a country does not meet all the criteria, so a choice has been made that can be seen as a best estimate.

It may also have to do with the status of the provider, and then, for example, in view of the provision by a higher education institution, also to position it as such within the EHEA.

Clarity can be obtained about this in a follow-up study in which this grading can be discussed in more detail.

3. Changes in the system – in the national context - register

Incidentally, the national system changes over time, based on a new offer, the taking of political decisions and situations that require a reorientation. It may then be good to have a classification at some point, with the state of affairs, and then instruct a country or organization to update the associated register on the basis of the public criteria.

4. International qualifications – 'double programs'

There are countries where several types of education and training are offered at a certain level. At level 5, for example, this could be a program called Higher VET, in addition to a program that belongs to higher education. An example can be found in the UK: Foundation Degree in Higher Education, the Higher National Diploma offered by Further Education Colleges. They fall under different sectors and also with different organizations that guarantee the quality and the level.

But it can also happen that there is a national qualification, together with an international qualification at the same level. There are countries that, with the approval of the government, have partnerships with, for example, English organizations to ensure an international network for an offer in such a country. But other constructions are also possible.

In order to have a transparent overview, with a clear division, it is necessary to only use qualifications that are based in terms of accreditation on the national system.

5. EQF and ISCED

The EQF has eight levels. In addition, the past ten years have shown that a NQF is being used more and more, especially in higher education and related sectors, especially now that the NQFs are assessed at European level for their link to the EQF.

This means that the highest level that is internationally regarded as the regular requirement for entry into higher education is level 4 of the EQF. This allows admission to degree programs at level 5 or level 6.

Another factor is that the SCHE has been and is being introduced by countries on a voluntary basis. Several countries start HE at level 6. Then there are several options:

- Opportunities are offered for providers of VET up to and including level 4 to also offer qualifications at 5, with the agreement that holders of such a diploma are entitled to progress to a qualification at level 6.
- There are possibilities for certain sectors to offer programs in consultation with the HEIs through certain educational institutes, whereby on the basis of specific agreements a lateral entry into a level 6 study program is possible.
- There is no national policy about having level 5 of the NQF and the way in which lateral influx at level 6 is feasible. This is done on the basis of customization and the use of RPL.

The use of the EQF raises the question of what role the ISCED plays in educational institutions, apart from the data required for all kinds of statistical studies by the OECD.

A confusing situation arises when using the ISCED at levels 4 and 5. For 5 it says 'short cycle tertiary education'. A strong suggestion is made here of the use of the term 'tertiary' as being the same as or equivalent to the term 'higher', in the sense used for the EHEA.

Level 4 is then, among other things, used for 'post-secondary/non-tertiary', a category that can no longer be placed in the current modern setting, especially when using the EQF.

Everything that can be found after 'secondary' is 'tertiary'. In addition, it stands for the levels that are higher than 4 in the EQF and absolutely not for 'higher' in the EHEA, as already stated.

The term 'post-secondary/non-tertiary' should now be seen as Higher VET and other qualifications that fall into the 'non-formal' category. So it no longer concerns programs that exceed 4 and do not fall under 'higher education'. That offer therefore requires its own approach and 'column', in addition to the QF-EHEA.

6. Binary system

An aspect that is often underexposed but is absolutely relevant for all kinds of research and also making proposals about the system with level 5 and above is having a binary system in a national higher education area. This means that there are two types of HEIs, namely HEIs that works with programs with an academic orientation resp. a professional orientation.

In the current situation, the name for the first form is clear, namely University. There are more international names for the second. The oldest is Polytechnic, but that name has the same problem as 'technical education'. Subsequently, the term University Colleges was used, but also increasingly University of Applied Sciences. The problem with the UAS is the lack of the designation 'Doctor', also a term used by the Universities. A general solution for this has not yet been found.

A name that has also surfaced, but then for example in Canada, is 'Institute'. This concerns a former Community College that has also started to offer professional bachelor's degree programs, thus distinguishing itself from the University. In practice, however, this has resulted in a binary system.

If a country only has the University type, i.e. having an unitary system, it will suffice that such institutions offer 'higher education'. In that case, the choice is made within the offer to focus on the academic or professional orientation, or a mix of these. In practice, the latter will almost always be the case, since the University also trains for a job, i.e. for a profession.

If we are going to make proposals for the sector within the tertiary supply that builds on VET, at levels 5 and higher, under the name Higher Vocational-Professional Education, the question is of course whether a binary system within the HVPE sector is needed.

In the US, among the Community Colleges offering SCHE (to see it in the European context), it can be seen that there can be two degrees:

- Associate of Arts/Sciences – with the aim of progressing to a University
- Associate of Applied Arts/Sciences – if it concerns a purely labor market-oriented outflow.

A comparable situation can be found in the system within the UK, namely having the Foundation Degree (FD) with the status of belonging to higher education and the Higher National Diploma (HND) with a strong focus on business.

Both qualifications can be offered by Colleges – in addition to the fact that the Universities also offer the FD themselves, especially on the basis of work-based learning.

It is not advisable to record a binary system at HVPE in advance, in order to preserve transparency as much as possible. It is up to the providers to make clear internally what the rights of a holder of a diploma are, in view of the transfer to higher education or to the labor market.

7. Some short observations

- There is no reason whatsoever to speak of 'Short Cycle Tertiary Education' when referring to short programs that end at level 5 and do not belong to the EHEA. So it can literally be called a 'short program' - or 'Short Tertiary Education'. Incidentally, the proposal to stop using this concept of SCTE at all – as we elaborate on it later when drawing up a scheme – is a model for the entire tertiary supply.
- The European Commission is striving for a European Education Area. In our opinion, this concerns the entire system, a complete model, for everything that can be found at levels 1 to 8. With this, the EHEA will have to be given a place, in which we expect many lively discussions. If there is not an overall strategy and approach, we fear that an EEA will turn out to be a utopia.
- It is therefore necessary for the HVPE sector to start its own process in the short term. In doing so, of course, use can be made of the experience gained with the Bologna Process.
- The OECD's research can be a good springboard for initiating that process.

8. Status of providers

The status of the providers is a point of attention, but can be seen as an extension of the pursuit of a transparent scheme and model for levels 5 and higher, so to be seen as the tertiary system.

There will undoubtedly be a correlation with the status of the qualification that is being offered. This can lead to having to look closely at the criteria that are attached to a qualification.

For example, a particular institution can be designed to offer both VET and HE. In a formal sense, they fall under different regimes. In principle, the institution will have to regard itself as a combination of a VET College and a HEI. In other words, it is not a VET College that offers higher education. This distinction will also play a role in a legal sense, so that there is an entity under the general management for both forms, in order to be able to guarantee that the formal requirements can be met.

9. Assumptions for a scheme for level 5 and higher

So we want to propose a scheme, a model, for levels 5 and above, as a starting point for identifying the supply in a country. We include the following:

- We call the entire system from level 5 on the 'tertiary sector'. So there is no question of post-secondary or a name similar to that.

- It concerns a design in the international context, so not a requirement for the member countries to also use the names nationally. They can also have more classifications, with their own criteria, but that is up to the country itself.
- We base ourselves on the EQF, and with that the countries can use their NQF. The ISCED format can also be linked to that, with the refinement required for the statistics.
- In the first phase of describing the tertiary sector, there are three sub-sectors within the tertiary sector: Higher Education, Higher Vocational-Professional Education and Business Education and Training. In the second phase we can look at what a meaningful further subdivision is, for further considerations – where relevant.
- In Higher Education, no distinction is made between countries with a unitary and a binary system. In the EHEA, the same name is used for the cycle at every level (short, first, second, third), and the international names for the cycles are also the same for the institutions. In the national context, a subdivision can be made according to the orientation: Academic or Professional, together with the use of additions to the degrees (think of 'of Arts', 'of Science', 'of Liberal Arts', 'of Business Administration', etc. It is also up to a country itself whether in the case of a binary system all cycles can be found at the institutions that offer Professional Higher Education, just as the Short Cycle can be omitted completely.
- The name Higher VET is therefore not used by us. This name is confusing for the following reasons: It looks too much like Higher Education and thus creates the wrong suggestion, it concerns forms that rise above level 4 and no longer fit the pure interpretation of VET, and just like with HE, the transfer training to another sub-sector.
- It is not clear who should or can make a decision about this, but we propose linking the Associate degree to the SCHE in an international context. It is up to the countries themselves to use as a name in the international context, for recognizability.
- For the HE sub-sector, there are names in the international setting for the cycles, i.e. for the degrees that are available within the EHEA. They are international common names based on mutual trust: Bachelor, Master and Doctorate – the Doctorate is about awarding the degree of PhD.
- Nothing has yet been arranged for the HVPE sub-sector. There is no process like the Bologna Process that started in 1999. People talk about Higher VET and similar concepts, but there are no levels associated with it – so everything is HVET. It is also not clear whether it is about cycles, levels, degrees or something, as in the EHEA.
- To give a first impression in this regard, the scheme has chosen to add a letter to each level, not a number, since a number stands for the entire level, including the qualifications in the other sub-sectors.
- That's why we use: HVPE-A, HVPE-B, HVPE-C and HVPE-D.
- Whether names can be used internationally can also be devised in the long term. For the EHEA one could fall back on existing names, recognizable for the target groups. It is obvious to use English names, given the recognizability.

Incidentally, we also have to see whether it will be a worldwide scheme. From now on, the emotions that arise when using national names and concepts will certainly have to be taken into account. There are of course also similar developments in other parts of the world, although the EQF is recognized as an excellent starting point for worldwide cooperation.

- Within the tertiary sector, we opt for a division into 'formal' and non-formal'.
- By formal we mean that there is a structure in which the government plays a direct or indirect role. This can be done through legislation and regulations, monitoring quality, determining which institutions provide the supply and how the monitoring of all this can be arranged, and how to intervene if necessary. This may concern both publicly funded and private institutions. It also concerns all forms of presentation, as permitted by law and regulations.
- The sub-sectors that fall under 'formal' are: Higher Education and Higher Vocational-Professional Education.

- By 'non-formal' we mean the sub-sector 'Business Education and Training'. This concerns qualifications that fall outside the responsibility of the government. They are almost always offered privately, in collaboration with organizations that focus on specific target groups.
- Because we also do this for formal training, the starting point for inclusion in this sub-sector is the link to the NQF. This means that the level can in any case be determined independently.
- This also means that the qualification is offered for a longer period of time and that it is therefore also possible to check its usefulness. It is not a question of qualifications to be provided once or twice.
- The qualification is also aimed at well-defined groups, which can also be identified by the activities and the core competencies associated with them.

In addition, there are many qualifications and courses that are provided within a specific sector or industry or a sector of the labor market. In that case, they can be linked to a so-called sectoral framework, by looking at the structure of the functions that can be designated as such in that sector. These courses can be included if the sectoral framework can be linked to the NQF, in the same way as an NQF is linked to the EQF.

A specific role in all this is reserved for what you might say are 'independent' units of qualifications that can be included in this scheme. These are offered separately in many countries, leading to certificates. They can be used in a certain context at a later stage to obtain exemptions if someone starts with that a full training. They are not linked to the NQF, but therefore have a certain status due to the way in which they are marketed.

It makes no sense to include these units in the scheme, partly because of the lack of a standard for this.

We realize that in addition to the qualifications that can be included in the scheme for the tertiary sector, there are still many routes that can be seen as falling under the non-formal provision. This can range from one-day training courses to programs that can be followed over a long period of time next to or under work. This can lead to a statement or a certificate.

But they have certain values in a limited context. They are based on the demand that an employer formulates for a group of employees, to be converted into customization that a private provider can provide.

The last two forms of training mentioned, offering units and having a very diverse range of short courses, could be classified under what is now mainly understood as the 'micro credential'. It is true that there is a worldwide discussion about what this should be understood as exactly as possible, in combination with its usefulness for lifelong learning, taking short programs and enrolling in formal training. However, it is clear that there is no space available for the MCs in the tertiary sector scheme.

10. Using the scheme for tertiary education and training

- For each sub-sector for formal education, we provide a (limited) number of criteria when it comes to positioning a certain type of qualification within the tertiary sector. This is a first form of incorporating national qualifications into an international scheme.
- Each country may then be asked to indicate for each type of qualification in which sub-sector it belongs and also at which level. This notification is the responsibility of the country itself, but after the first inventory, a working group (to be set up) will examine whether there is reason to have further information provided.

Below we give the diagrams for the 'tertiary sector'. The first one includes the types of qualifications that are at levels 5 and above, and should be considered as formal qualifications

This therefore concerns the undivided subsector for Higher Education and the subsector for Higher Vocational Education.

Sub-sectors HE and HVPE

Formal education

EQF	HE (EHEA) Higher Education Academic / Professional	HVPE Higher Vocational- Professional Education	Sector
8	Third Cycle (Doctorate)	HVPE-D	Tertiary
7	Second Cycle (Master)	HVPE-C	
6	First Cycle (Bachelor)	HVPE-B	
5	Short Cycle (Associate)	HVPE-A	

CRITERIA EHEA (not limited)

- Qualifications at level 5 and higher of the EQF
- Formal education
- The country is participating in the EHEA
- Cycles
- Dublin Descriptors (or compatible descriptors, based on the DDs)
- ECTS
- European Standards and Guidelines (Quality Assurance & Accreditation)
- Possibility for progression to the next cycle
- Degrees
- HEIs.

CRITERIA HVPE (not limited)

- Qualifications at level 5 and higher of the EQF
- Not meeting all criteria of the EHEA
- Vocational-Professional Orientation
- Formal
- Quality guaranteed by an external organization
- Long-term running
- HVPE Colleges – entities that are authorized and accountable
- Quality assurance system, external and internal
- Ability to advance to the next level within HVPE or HE.

Sub-sector Business Education and Training (BET)

Next to the two formal sub-sectors there is the sub-sector for Business Education and Training (BET). This concerns the scope for qualifications that do not fall under HE and HVPE, but are linked to an NQF, based on a procedure that is carried out by a National Coordination Point (NCP). This sub-sector explicitly includes the qualifications that are seen in the VET sector as 'training (T)'. Within the EHEA they are not seen as higher education, but as part of the provision on the private market for training. So there is no 'HET', and for that reason we only use HVPE and not HVPET. However, T-qualifications can be offered by HEIs and HVPE-Colleges and therefore they are mentioned separately in the scheme. Then there are the pure qualifications that can be found at Business Academies and other private institutions, among other places.

It is also the case that qualifications that fall under BET in the scheme can be part of the formal training within the HE and the HVPE. This will especially be the case when it comes to qualifications

that in themselves have a demonstrable civil effect and can thus contribute to the labor market relevance of formal training.

As indicated earlier in this document, we do not intend to provide a list of criteria at this stage of establishing a scheme, for this type of tertiary education and training at level 5 and above. This is partly due to the fact that the design of BET has its own interpretation in almost every country.

However, international qualifications could be looked at, i.e. in a situation in which they are used in several countries. They are mainly offered in an international setting, with the level and quality guaranteed by an internationally operating organization.

It appears that it is difficult to reach agreements about international recognition and thus a classification at a level of the EQF.

One idea might be to grant this recognition if the link to an NQF (and thus indirectly to the EQF) has taken place in at least 5 countries. This then means that all other countries will take over that recognition and the level determination.

Non-Formal education

EQF	BTE Business Training and Education			Sector
	Training Non-Formal Offered by HEIs	Training Non-Formal Offered by 'other (private) institutions' and 'Business Academies'	Training Non-Formal Offered by HVPE Colleges	
8	X	X	X	Tertiary
7	X	X	X	
6	X	X	X	
5	X	X	X	

11 The European Level 5 Area

A development that we consider important is the search for possibilities to specifically look at the whole of qualifications that can be positioned at level 5. We call that spectrum with qualifications that fall under the Short Cycle, HVPE-A and BET at level 5 the 'European Level 5 Area'.

If there is room during discussions about the European Education Area to look at the role of an EL5A in shaping flexible learning pathways, using qualifications at level 5, we can take the lead. Obviously, there must first be agreement on the interpretation of the levels that fall under 'tertiary education and training'...

European Level 5 Area

EQF-5	SCHE	Business Education and Training	HVPE-A
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Annex

Just to show that the discussions about Higher VET are still very alive... From the website of EPALE (European Commission), a contribution...

27 September 2021

[Your VET keeps lifting me Higher \(and higher\) – Observing Higher VET, its shifts and opportunities](#)

[Monika Auzinger](#)

The topic of higher VET has emerged as an important theme in policy debates at European level in the past couple of years. It is commonly understood that labour markets increasingly need people with vocational skills at higher levels to ensure global competitiveness, innovation and economic growth. According to [OECD reports](#), the share of highly-skilled jobs has increased by 25% over the last two decades.

Why the buzz about higher VET?

Higher VET is considered to have the potential to increase the attractiveness of VET, by opening up vocational pathways that may potentially reach up to the highest levels of educational attainment. It might play a key role in supporting lifelong learning and opening up education and training systems to more diverse groups of learners; and contribute to enabling easier transitions between VET and higher education. In this context, higher VET is often referred to as being well placed to address some of the current challenges we face. Two important recent VET policy documents have re-emphasised the need to further develop the VET offer at higher levels. The **Council Recommendation on VET** recommends that 'Vocational education and training programmes at EQF levels 5 to 8 are further developed to support a growing need for higher vocational skills in line with national context'.

Meanwhile, the **Osnabrück Declaration 2020** on vocational education and training as an enabler of recovery and just transitions to digital and green economies emphasises 'the relevance of **VET programmes at EQF levels 5 to 8 on par with HE** in order to offer VET graduates a flexible, inclusive and valuable path to high-level jobs and career opportunities in response to current and future socio-economic needs' and calls for the establishment of quality and effective VET programmes at EQF level 5 and above as one of its short-term deliverables for the period 2021 – 2025. Yet, upon closer inspection, the topic of higher VET is not exactly a recent one to emerge at EU policy level. Back in 2010, the [Bruges Communiqué](#) on enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training for the period 2011-20 explicitly called on Member States to 'develop or maintain post-secondary or higher VET at EQF level 5 or higher, as appropriate, and contribute to achieving the EU headline target of 40% with tertiary or equivalent education'.

Higher + VET = higher VET! (?)

What exactly do we understand by higher VET? This question is not one that comes with a straightforward answer. Generally, higher VET refers to vocationally oriented education and training at higher levels (typically offered at levels EQF 5 and above). In many countries, it is offered as **higher-level vocationally oriented education and training outside higher education**, which may include various programme and qualification types, such as post-secondary level VET and higher-level continuous VET (CVET) offered within and without the formal education system. Depending on the respective (national) context and concept used, this may or may not include higher professional and vocational types of programmes that are included in the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA), therefore part of the 'Bologna System'.

Examples for these are short-cycle and professional Bachelor and Master's degrees, sometimes also labelled 'professional higher education'. However, in most countries and contexts, there is no commonly understood [definition of higher VET](#), and only in very few cases it is considered as a sector of the education and training system on its own. In addition, higher VET offers often overlap with continuing vocational education and training (CVET) or higher education. When taking a look at the descriptions of national education and training systems, the term 'higher VET' is rarely used, although most countries have some forms of VET programmes or qualifications at higher levels on offer.

What does higher VET look like at national level? Some examples.....

Vocationally oriented education and training at higher levels is already offered in many countries, and comes in many shapes and forms. Across countries, we can observe an overall expansion and diversification of higher VET over the past two decades. In particular, one can observe a notable expansion of 'short-cycle VET degrees' offered at NQF levels linked to EQF level 5. The profiles of vocationally oriented programmes and qualifications at higher levels often include both academic and vocational elements. Integration of on-the-job learning can be increasingly observed for these qualifications and programmes, for instance through traineeships or through formats of dual or apprenticeship training. In several countries, these developments have led to a changing profile and scope of the institutions that offer VET, and to increasingly blurry boundaries between the HE sector and VET. Some countries have even established a separate new track for higher VET, such as **Sweden**, where the new system of Higher Vocational Education was established in 2008. The so-called 'Yrkeshögskolan' offer tertiary vocational education at EQF levels 5 and 6. Overall, the field of higher VET remains one characterised by a large degree of diversity and heterogeneity across countries. The following two examples show how the topic of higher VET is being framed from a national perspective. **Norway** is currently reviewing its national qualifications framework (NKR), which was adopted in 2011 and referenced to the EQF in 2014. One aspect of the review refers to the placement of higher VET qualifications in the framework, as vocational colleges (EQF level 5) are striving for the possibility to provide education beyond NKR level 5. In **Austria**, there is an ongoing discussion at policy level as to whether there is need for a separate 'higher VET' education segment, by establishing the term 'higher vocational education and training' (HVET) as a label. The main driver behind these debates is to bring more visibility and transparency to an aspect of education and training that is somewhat 'off the radar': a sizeable share of qualifications that can be considered higher VET are offered outside the higher education sector. Most of the time, they are not part of the formal education systems and thus not covered by international statistical classifications (such as ISCED) and, to date, only very few of these qualifications have been allocated to the NQF.

Some challenges and possible solutions

Due to the heterogeneity of these qualifications and programmes, higher VET as a sector is difficult to pin down - it lacks transparency and visibility. In particular, qualifications offered outside the formal system are often not (yet) included in a National Qualifications Framework (NQF). It is therefore not always clear whether a given vocational qualification can be considered to be 'at a higher level'. In addition to the lack of visibility mentioned earlier, higher VET qualifications are sometimes regarded as less respected and favourable options compared to more academically oriented qualifications at higher levels. The further implementation of NQFs and the European Qualifications Framework can play an important role in creating better transparency and visibility of higher VET, also improving its image and reputation. Its eight reference levels for qualifications, defined in terms of learning outcomes, offer a means of assessing the level of a certain qualification and demonstrating those which indeed can be considered to be higher level. One step of potential value in terms of enhanced visibility and transparency, might be to explore arrangements for the inclusion of higher VET offers (especially those offered outside the formal system) within international statistics and classifications, such as ISCED.

What do you think?

Is there a need to develop a common European understanding of the higher VET?

Can you observe any recent developments with regard to higher VET in your country, and if yes, what does it relate to?

Is there an ongoing debate about higher VET qualifications and their role in the VET system of your country?

Share your views on higher VET with the Community under this post!

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