

**The structure of a
'High Vocational-Professional Education (HVPE) Area'
and
a 'European Level 5 (EL5) Area'**

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**The structure of a
'High Vocational-Professional Education (HVPE) Area'
and
a 'European Level 5 (EL5) Area'
&
Ideas for international common names and terms
in the Tertiary Education Area
*Incl. a proposal for having a process for those developments***

Chapter 1

Introduction

This document (and the whole bundle of documents) is bursting with ambitions. You will have to agree with this as you read it (them). But it is certainly necessary to meet the challenges associated with the proposals. There are quite a few of these, especially when it comes to an international approach to newly formulated educational sectors. In fact, many countries are already involved in this today and there will certainly be more over time. Consider the Bologna Process that started in 1999 with a number of countries within the European Union and where many more countries are now prepared to use the agreements concerning the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

We want to provide substantive input for a comparable process that possibly can set in motion, with a number of documents - of which this is the first one in a series. Such a process should be focused on the education sector for the levels 5 and higher of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), which emerged parallel to the EHEA and is already becoming increasingly important in a lot of countries. As CHAIN5 we will give this sector the international name 'High Vocational-Professional Education Area (HVPE Area)'. This growing attention is partly due to the use of that EQF and the national frameworks that are increasingly used for comparing qualifications.

As such, it concerns an education sector that, like the EHEA, is part of the 'Tertiary Education Area'. This TEA is formed by the qualifications at levels 5 and higher of the EQF and therefore the comparable levels of the NQFs. In recent years and also at this moment, people have always talked about a sector of 'Higher Vocational Education and Training (Higher VET)', as one of the options to build on the VET sector (up to and including level 4). But more and more other formats have been added, partly due to the collaboration with the Professional Higher Education Area (PHE Area) as part of the EHEA (next to Academic Higher Education Area) and the creation of stand-alone Colleges for level 5 and often also together with the provision of level 6 qualifications.

That is why we now explicitly refer to the 'High Vocational-Professional Education Area' as an international term. This HVPE Area is therefore for formal and also non-formal qualifications at levels 5 and higher, as a sector that can be positioned parallel to the EHEA – but having a design to offer more flexibility.

In recent years we have noticed that the lack of a form of coordination between countries in the further development of a national 'HVPE Area' - also in connection with the national 'HE Area' - leads to a lot of ambiguity and confusion surrounding international cooperation. That is a pity and also unnecessary.

Therefore, we present a general and broad-based proposal with regard to making agreements on the international context concerning the HVPE Area. Each country can then organize or adapt its own education system on this basis, since 'education' is simply a national responsibility.

In short, if a 'HVPE Area process' can be initiated in the coming years, we would like to support it without further ado. In connection with this, we think that the most important point of application can be the offer at level 5, with the 'Level 5 Area (L5 Area)' as a hinge between the sectors involved. This makes it an extra challenge, but it is worth it.

As mentioned, this document is number 1 in a series on topics that touch on the introduction of the HVPE Area and therefore the associated sector, as well as the further positioning of the L5 Area

as a connecting sector in a horizontal sense: HVPE Area and EHE Area, and in a vertical sense: Secondary Education (levels till 4) and Tertiary Education (level 5 and higher).

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 - a Levels within the HVPEA
 - b Learning paths within the HVPEA
 - c Progression from 5 (HVPE - SCHE) to 6 (First Cycle)
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 - e Specific solutions for SCHE and level 5 – national context
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8. Use of micro-credentials in the EL5A
9. Why having the EHEA and the HVPEA next to each other...

CHAIN5

CHAIN5 is the 'international community of practice for level 5 qualifications'. Over the past eleven years, with the efforts of many stakeholders, we have succeeded in generating attention for the design of 'a Level 5 Area' in Europe. This has led to adjustments to the system in a growing number of countries by also effectively completing a national Level 5 Area. A result is that we can see a strong growth in student numbers in many countries, demonstrating that there is an undeniable need for this type of qualification. Further information can be found on the website www.chain5.net.

Why CHAIN5 as a driver for this initiative

As CHAIN5, we are taking the initiative for this topic and thus for a discussion that, in our opinion, needs to be formed in order to achieve innovation within tertiary education - levels 5 and higher. This could lead to an international process, involving countries, organizations and experts who will endorse this aim in the near future.

Naturally, such an initiative can in principle be taken from a lot of angles and with the support of many organizations. In recent years we have noted that various plans have been continuously formulated, but these have not (yet) led to concrete actions. Many projects also touch on what is discussed in this documents and the following ones and we will try to include them in the plans.

In addition, it can be seen that many countries have already started to further develop their national tertiary education system due to the lack of an international form of coordination. They have of course had to make choices, also when it comes to the type of qualifications, the possible providers and the names that can be used in the international context. It therefore appears that international coordination regarding coordination is not yet in the offing in the short term.

Level 5 of the EQF with various types of qualifications cuts across all sectors, vertically and horizontally. As CHAIN5 we can therefore be a connecting factor, without being focused on a specific sector. Hence this document and our proposals.

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 (areas). 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 can and may participate in the process that we intend to initiate.

Texts in frames

Some texts have been framed in a number of places in the document. We would like to indicate that what is stated there is in a way important within the whole of the proposals. So if you have less time to go through everything, it is certainly interesting to read those texts in order to get an idea of the direction in which that part of the document is going...

In short

Focus on The High Vocational-Professional Education Area and the European Level 5 Area

This first – general - part of this series is intended to outline our plans for achieving a more transparent classification of what is offered at levels 5 and higher of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), and thus of the National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) associated with it. That is why we will discuss what is already there, what is going on and how international research is being conducted into which types of formal and non-formal qualifications can be included in this Tertiary Education Area (TEA).

The chapters of this part are therefore expressly intended to provide an impetus for further discussions in an international context. In addition, countries such as these that already participate in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), i.e. in the Bologna Process, can see how they think they can contribute to this for their own national tertiary education area. Then we are talking about a National Higher Education Area (NHEA).

Process for qualifications parallel to the EHEA – High Vocational-Professional Education

But first of all, the focus is very explicitly on a subsequent process that we have in mind and which has to do with the positioning of all formal qualifications that are provided in parallel to the EHEA and the NHEAs) at levels 5 and higher. A lot is already going on in this regard in many countries, but as we show in this part 1, it is also necessary to initiate an international process for this. The desired transparency within the tertiary education area undoubtedly benefits from this. National and international cooperation between providers of formal qualifications can be prevented from being hampered in the near future by uncertainty about the status of qualifications and possibly their providers.

International name for this parallel education area explained

This will be discussed further in this document, but here is already a brief explanation of the name we propose to use internationally for the area that is to be found parallel to the EHEA, namely High Vocational-Professional Education Area, so HVPE Area (HVPEA).

The combination of Vocational and Professional points to an education area that can build on the VET sector but is also close to the Professional Higher Education sector, especially if countries have a binary higher education system. This way you can always play flexibly with the design of the HVPE Area, in the national context.

We do not use the term 'European' in the name. As the Bologna Process shows, there is much more interest in joining in. We expect this to also happen for a process surrounding the HVPE Area.

It is important to consider the use of 'High' in the name. We are not concerned with 'Higher', as a form of contradiction, possibly thinking of 'lower' qualifications. Including 'High' is a reference to levels 5 and above. We can also do justice to the positioning that has been used in various countries, with the use of national and international concepts. Its 'value' can be honored as such.

European Level 5 Area

It is also the case that, in line with initiating a process to arrive at international agreements for the High Vocational-Professional Education Area – and appropriate 'instruments' – we draw attention to the educational area that has to do with all qualifications at level 5 of the EQF. That area is also part of the Tertiary Education Area, and therefore runs straight through the EHEA and the HVPE Area. It also provides the bridge from secondary to tertiary education, i.e. for levels 4 and 6. This will therefore also be discussed in this document and the other parts of this series.

PART I – BACKGROUNDS EXPOSED

1.1 Introduction

This document provides suggestions for achieving international harmonization of the design and classification of the education system for levels 5 and higher of the EQF and the corresponding NQFs. In connection with this, English terms and concepts that are used in the international context for formal education within this system are examined, with a view to reaching international agreements on common names for all relevant concepts.

The aim is to make everything more recognizable and transparent when international cooperation takes place and all kinds of plans and strategies are used, developed and updated. It is emphatically not the intention to have the national systems and associated classifications adjusted in this way and/or to make national names, terms and concepts mandatory. Agreement on international coordination in those areas can subsequently contribute to a better form of understanding across national borders.

1.2 Few background notes, to start with... the Bologna Process

We start with the Bologna Process. Since its inception at the end of the last century, a lot of work has been done to shape what is now known as the 'European Higher Education Area (EHEA)'. Over the years, many countries from outside the EU have joined in, in order to significantly increase their opportunities for international cooperation. It is still 'European', but it is actually better to speak of a 'Higher Education Area' as such.

Agreements for the higher education area

All kinds of agreements have been made for the EHEA in order to improve and increase the recognizability of higher education between countries. Important instruments are mainly the use of 'European Credits (EC)' for the study load, a diploma supplement, the European Standard and Guidelines for quality assurance and having the so-called Dublin Descriptors. Only courses and study programmes that meet these requirements and then fit into one of the four formal cycles are considered to be part of a higher education system.

Binary system in higher education

In addition, a country may have a binary higher education system, i.e. it may have two types of orientations: Professional and Academic. It is up to each government whether or not to have a binary classification, but in all cases the agreements within the EHEA apply to all providers, i.e. the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). These

institutions then fall under a National Higher Education Area (NHEA). In a binary system we can talk about a 'University' and a 'Professional Higher Education Institution', but we will come back to that if it is about 'names'.

Agreements about international names

All kinds of international agreements have been made about the use of English names for certain aspects of the EHEA and therefore of an NHEA if countries can communicate internationally. But these agreements are not mandatory in the formal sense. It is always up to a national government to decide how to deal with these agreements in the national and subsequently the appropriate international context. As mentioned, this stems from the fact that 'education' and the associated system is by definition a national matter. Within the EU, let alone outside it, there are no options for 'Brussels' to impose obligations on national governments.

National responsibility

Naturally, we have been working for years with all kinds of European budgets for education and training, at all levels, like Erasmus+, Horizon and for having Centers of Vocational Excellence, European University Alliances and other initiatives. But they can also be used on a voluntary basis by a country and education providers and their organizations. In line with this, there are all kinds of European and international working groups and platforms in which discussions are held about possible joint coordination on all kinds of matters, but in principle each country can also pursue its own policy regarding its use and embedding in all kinds of systems.

This is also an example of the vulnerability of the EHEA because there is no formal central control over compliance with these agreements and the ability to hold each other accountable. Meetings are held periodically by the ministers involved in higher education, but this mainly concerns examining new developments and how further non-binding agreements can be made about them.

Role of the EQF

There was and is therefore a lot of focus on the EHEA. But in the past more than twenty years, a lot has also been initiated regarding education, research and training - formal and non-formal. This may also be due to the success of the Bologna process, which has made it clear that, in principle, common agreements can be made as a basis for cooperation, but in which countries can see in their own way where the benefits lie in participating.

Since 2008, an important development that plays a role in this is the formal use of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) for positioning formal and non-formal qualifications offered in a country, linking them as such to an NQF. All countries within the EU (and many of the countries that have joined the EQF) now have a working system for this. This means that comparable qualifications in different countries can lead to cooperation in a specific context, useful for the mobility of students, learners and workers.

NHEA and NQF

This means, among other things, that a country may or may not work with a formal link between its National Higher Education Area (NHEA) and the associated cycles (and degrees) to levels 5, 6, 7 and 8 of the EQF and thus to the corresponding levels of the NQF. One can also choose to allow the NHEA to retain its own place in the educational system for all kinds of reasons, based on the so-called Qualifications Framework for the EHEA (QF-EHEA), but then to introduce other formal and possibly also non-formal qualifications at those levels through its own procedure. This can be done via a 'National Coordination Point (NCP)' or a comparable national organization.

Specific developments around level 5

To mention a few specific developments concerning level 5 of the EQF, which will also be discussed later when it concerns general matters and are expressly related to this:

- After the formal inclusion of the Short Cycle Higher Education (SCHE) in the EHEA in 2018 as a stand-alone cycle with its own status, there has been a strong growth in the supply of associated qualifications in countries that offer this opportunity within Higher Education;
- The range of formal and non-formal qualifications at level 5 of the EQF has grown in many countries, made visible by being linked to the corresponding level of the NQF;
- There is the emergence of independent educational institutions that offer formal qualifications at level 5, and often in combination with level 6, parallel to the NHEA, with their own relevance for the labour market and with their own specific organization in mind for the quality assurance system;

- There is a clear growth in demand for qualifications that build on the offering within the VET sector up to and including level 4 of the EQF, and are thus offered at level 5 and higher, possibly by the same VET institutions, but also within independent institutions.

1.3 Getting the structure in order with transparency

With the ever-increasing need for international cooperation at all levels, including in view of the above developments in a sector that deserves a lot of attention, the urgent question is whether it is really time to make common agreements on the use of names, concepts and terms for all kinds of matters related to it.

There are many initiatives and projects that look at what could be set up by institutions across country borders, preferably in the broadest possible approach and context. This then provides more opportunities to involve more parties without having to wonder what is meant by a particular concept. Possible obstacles within an Erasmus+ approach can also be removed by clarifying in which setting the partners in a project operate and what their status is, nationally and internationally.

The other side of the story is whether there would be a problem if those joint agreements were not made for that parallel sector (levels 5 and higher), in addition to the EHEA. Each country can always have its own considerations and then not use what is proposed. As mentioned, there is no organization in Europe or beyond that has the power to prescribe something and then enforce it. This concerns a broad area with regard to the range of qualifications on offer.

This happens through all kinds of sectors that have their own history, (very) long but sometimes only (very) short. As mentioned, the EHEA therefore has its own instruments, such as the frameworks for internal and external quality assurance, for which ENQA as the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education serves as a platform for the affiliated national accreditation organizations. But there are also several players active 'in the field' of how training courses should function when it comes to labour market relevance, efficiency and the requirements regarding level and quality.

A kind of international compendium (handbook) may be useful

Nevertheless, we think it is worthwhile to use this document, in connection with the discussion about a process for the HVPE area (sector), to initiate the preparation of a kind of 'handbook' for the use of common names and terms. At the instigation of the European Commission, the aim is to create a 'European Education Area' with all affiliated countries as supporting members, as a complete bundling of all sectors at all levels.

Then such a conceptual framework can only be very useful for the higher levels. But also in the pursuit of 'European University Alliances' in which international networks are set up around higher education and research, this means that there must be common language use in terms of collaboration to clarify the target groups that are being worked on.

We are therefore fully aware that in recent years choices have been made in many countries regarding the use of national names and terms and, according to the government, appropriate English-language 'translations', without being able to use an international source because there is simply not one.

Nevertheless, we make the proposal in the belief that in the long term every country can benefit from this, and therefore also Europe and countries that would like to join all kinds of frameworks. This has been clearly visible in recent years, which gives us confidence in taking this initiative.

1.4 Taking care of agreements – and a committee...

As stated above, the EU (along with all those countries that would like to participate in what is being developed and agreed within the EU) does not have its own agency that can be asked to draw up the necessary frameworks as outlined here. Agreements are always made in consultations between countries and by as many ministers as possible who meet to discuss all kinds of developments. They can also send national representatives when it comes to specific sectors to exchange ideas and outline possible frameworks. But those people and organizations will always have to go back to their own government to ratify any matters. This can certainly slow things down if additional requirements arise from the national context. Interests must also be weighed up if this does not lead to a compromise.

Set up a small 'committee' to coordinate the start-up phase

Our proposal to all stakeholders involves setting up an international committee of limited size to coordinate matters as best as possible, with the option of providing targeted advice. Who can and should take the initiative for this can be seen in the near future, together with a number of European organizations that are closely involved in this subject.

2.1 Examples of 'confusion' – a reason for our initiative

Before we go into outlining our proposals regarding the design of the Tertiary Education Area, and then looking at the High Vocational-Professional Area including the Level 5 Area, here are a number of examples of the confusion that has and could arise if there is no clear agreements have been made regarding positioning and design.

- The second cycle within the EHEA is in principle linked to the general Bachelor's degree, also in countries with a binary system, but the name 'Professional Bachelor' is also still used.
- The Short Cycle HE label is in a number of countries attached to qualifications in all kinds of ways, without them meeting the criteria established for this within the EHEA.
- Specific names are used for certain qualifications in a country at level 5, but then an English name is added to them which can be confusing as it is a variant of 'Short Cycle HE'. Examples are Short Program HE and Short Cycle Tertiary Education.
- Countries that have formally introduced the SCHE have often come up with a national name for it, but no international degree has yet been agreed on for the English name, resulting in different names such as Associate (degree) and Foundation Degree.
- We will have a short document (number 3e) for this, but there can be very creative solutions for having not level 5 in the NHEA but in practice it will be a SCHE programme. An example is to have this programme 'within the first cycle' and divide level 6 into two stages: 6.1 (SCHE as such) and 6.2. Next to this there are level 5 qualifications in the HVPE Area.
- The third cycle has a number of degrees, such as PhD, Doctorate and Doctor, but some countries also use variations on this.
- In countries with a binary system for higher education, providers of Professional Higher Education have their own national name. Some of them: Fachhochschule, Hochschule, Høgskolen, Högskolan, Instituto Politécnico, Universidad tecnológica, Sveučilište... In English it is called a University of Applied Sciences in many countries, but it can also be an Applied Higher Education Institution, Applied University, Technological University, Polytechnic, University College, University of the Fine Arts, or something else.

- For institutions that do not belong to providers within higher education but to a parallel sector, English names are used in addition to their own national name. This can be seen, for example, in the use of the term College or Institute 'for Higher Vocational Education' or 'for Higher Vocational Training'.

2.2 Who should arrange this, and who can do it?

It is a national responsibility to consider how an education system can best be organized, especially when it comes to formal qualifications. In this context, formal means that there is a clear role for the government, through one or more ministries and related organizations. This may concern matters such as funding of certain sectors, carrying out accreditations, assessing the effectiveness of the offering, monitoring the quality of courses and institutions, encouraging the design of lifelong learning, monitoring cooperation with the business community, and there may be other matters in which the government has a clear involvement.

The resulting legislation is therefore also the responsibility of the government. All kinds of regulations are linked to this, to ensure that everything is and remains feasible in practice.

Especially in higher education, institutions are often autonomous in their actions, of course within the limits of the national law and regulations, with all kinds of necessary frameworks. They have their own national networks and associations that are discussion partners for the government. This allows the institutions to try to influence government policy and strategy.

Naturally, there is a role in all this for politicians, i.e. parliament, who control the government in their own way through the formally established structure. They can come up with bills and thus force the government to address issues, change and innovate.

International coordination and agreements

This means that if international agreements are made for education and training, there must be an opportunity to bring together representatives of national governments and determine, on the basis of a joint 'memorandum of understanding', to which matters those agreements will apply. Failure to adhere to these agreements cannot lead to sanctions, if only because there is also for this kind of issues no 'international inspectorate' that can make a decision to that effect. It does mean that people can informally address each other about 'deviant actions', but the consequences are only reporting it in public documents.

In addition, there are all kinds of funds approved by the European Parliament, intended for education. There are arrangements for distributing these funds through the European Commission and it is useful to be able to do this on the basis of common definitions. This can prevent confusion about the target groups, the objectives and the method of expenditure. This can be an incentive to continue to know 'what matters when spending European money', at least at an international level.

Mirroring the Bologna Process... in some way

Of course, the most striking example of a form of collaboration is the 'Bologna Process' that started at the end of the last century. The result is the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in which around 46 countries now formally participate, including those from outside the EU. Various agreements have been made about a number of characteristic aspects of higher education.

The ministers for higher education meet periodically to discuss the state of affairs for the EHEA and to consider how further cooperation can be achieved. This includes conducting research, setting up European University Alliances (using European funds) and also initiating efforts to link the EHEA to plans within the EU for a 'European Education Area (EEA)', so for the entire education and training system at all levels and all sectors.

3.1 EEA examined in more detail in this context

The EEA is an initiative that was launched in Brussels a number of years ago by the European Commission. The EC hopes that as many countries as possible will participate in order to achieve such a common 'total system', also because of the use of the budgets linked to the Erasmus+ fund. A lot of money is involved and therefore participating in the further development of such an EEA can be profitable.

There are all kinds of plans for the EEA on the table. The state of affairs will be assessed in 2025, but in the meantime it can already be noticed that more and more countries are showing interest in such a European system. The point is not that a national education system must necessarily be derived from this, but it offers the opportunity to learn from each other and whether constructions can be effective in designing learning paths that can be shaped within a sector but also that can cut across the sectors.

3.2 EVETA: also in the planning for Europe

Another important initiative that was recently taken by the European Parliament, but has also been raised before, has to do with the desire to create a process that should lead to the 'European Vocational Education and Training Area (EVETA)', within the EEA. The intention is, as happened with the EHEA, to seek harmonization of the system for VET qualifications, taking into account its importance for the international business world, international trade and the ability to collaborate on innovations. But being able to work together in filling all kinds of positions and activities and providing training and shaping labor mobility is also an important point of attention.

A specific point is the involvement of the business community in making training and education possible for workers. This requires all kinds of work-based learning, tailored to the possibilities that learners have when they have a job.

Naturally, the providers of VET qualifications play a role in all of this. It is true that there are all kinds of forms of VET education, partly depending on the classifications that are also used nationally. There is an enormous diversity when it comes to providers and the way in which they are involved in formal and non-formal qualifications.

It is possible that this initiative for an EVETA will be picked up by a number of countries at some point to start that process. And we can use this also.

3.3 Other sub-sectors in the EEA

We will come back to this later, but the pursuit of an EEA that includes the EHEA and possibly such an EVETA can lead to more attention for all kinds of 'subsystems', 'subsectors' and 'sub-areas'. Naturally, this takes place within the framework of such an EEA, but it offers the opportunity for more transparency within the entire system and for better cooperation between providers of the underlying qualifications.

3.4 Starting up an approach and a process

In any case, it means that processes related to harmonization require the involvement of as many countries as possible. This does not mean, for example, that the current 46 countries of the EHEA all have to join immediately. But if there is a large enough group to make agreements with, there may then be a process in which other countries will join in.

However, it is true that at least within such a process it must be clear what the possible consequences are for the EHEA and how the criteria and instruments developed therein can be linked to them.

4.1 Higher Education as a concept – and to be preserved

With the introduction of the EHEA, the concept of 'higher education' was emphatically given a place in every national education system. This could be with the offering of qualifications only by Universities, but it could also be in a binary system with, in addition to the Universities, the - which is now often used - Universities of Applied Sciences (but as already mentioned, more English names are being used – and we will discuss the proposal for an 'umbrella English name' later).

In the first case it concerns the concept as such: 'higher education'. In the second case, an 'orientation' is added: Academic HE and Professional HE, in most situations so called in the international context.

Criteria for Higher Education programmes and the EHEA

Very strictly speaking, these higher education institutions (HEIs) must meet the criteria set for a provider within the EHEA, i.e. the Bologna Process. But here too, this agreement does not entail any obligation for a government. The vast majority of countries that have a National Higher Education Area (NHEA) have organized this sector very strictly as such. But there are also a few others who have qualifications that do not meet all the agreed criteria or, on the other hand, others that also apply to different sectors. This is usually a conscious approach, in order to be able to defend multiple interests in its own country and to avoid an administrative dispute.

This can make it particularly difficult when it comes to mapping situations in countries, especially when international and research questions are asked about developments related to a NHEA. It is then clear that the answers are difficult to compare without knowing the exact differences in the design of the NHEA. More detailed insight will therefore have to be obtained if there is a suspicion that there is a deviation from the common criteria and instruments for the EHEA.

It also matters a lot which organization is asked about this situation and developments, to ensure that a complete picture can be sketched based on the answers. National education systems often fall as a whole under a specific ministry, but then their own (administrative) subdivisions have been made so that it is not always possible to paint a complete picture without consulting all those involved.

4.2 High and Low – to be avoided where possible

What always and still causes a lot of discussion in all kinds of countries is that using the term 'higher' implies that there is also something 'lower'. This has a clear impact on the position of courses in the sectors 'below' higher education, especially when it comes to formulating the admission requirements for higher education. The VET sector in particular has to deal with this, given its status among all kinds of target groups, such as parents and study counselors.

The situation has grown to such an extent that abandoning the concept of HE is not reasonable. The concept is so closely intertwined with all kinds of systems, developments and plans in the international context that no attempt should be made to come up with another name for HE as embedded in the EHEA.

Higher VET... no use anymore... as a proposal...

However, in recent years it has meant that in the slipstream of the EHEA, in many countries for other formal qualifications that do not fall under the HE but are provided in parallel with it, the concept 'higher' was also included in the national name, but above all in the international name. This, as it were, benefits from belonging to the higher levels and thus also from the status of HE.

The best-known and early example is having '*Higher* Vocational Education and Training', i.e. Higher VET, also abbreviated to HVET. Its use has subsequently led to other names in recent years to achieve even more distinction. This does not always contribute to the required transparency of the entire system, especially when it comes to the international context.

That is the main reason for refraining from using 'higher' as such in the proposed new names for qualifications that can already be found as such at the 'higher levels'.

We will explain this further in the document, saying already that we can use the term 'high' in a clear context...

5.1 EQF and NQF

Another important development that we would like to use a little further and therefore explain in the light of our proposals is the general introduction of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) in 2008, as a reference framework with eight levels and associated descriptors.

Each country then started introducing an associated National Qualifications Framework (NQF), often also with eight levels, but each country can deviate from this for demonstrable reasons. In this way, the levels of related courses can be compared with each other, making international cooperation possible.

In 2023 the moment has been reached that all countries that have embraced the EQF will have an NQF that is accepted by each other as a reference. This means that further agreements can be made about a form of transparency with the help of the EQF.

Observations here... relevant...

A number of observations that are relevant here:

- For the international VET sector as such, levels up to and including 4 are used. The situation that the highest level is 4 has to do with the fact that about eleven years ago it was decided within the EHEA to view this level as the highest one providing access to HE. This decision was accepted by the VET sector within Europe, partly because there were no organizations that could express their objection.
- Many countries have claimed levels 5 and higher for HE and also for Higher VET (which we now want to call High Vocational-Professional Education – High VPE or HVPE).
- However, there are several countries that still respect this decision but have not assigned a level to the cycles and degrees within their own NHEA. The names Bachelor and Master are used for the first respectively second cycle, but they expressly want to prevent non-formal qualifications or Higher VET at levels 6 and 7 from also being equated in status with those degrees.
- This means that countries can have two types of frameworks: an NQF without the HE area and the NHEA for the HE (also called QF-EHEA as such).

5.2 Do not use ISCED for this framework anymore, but do use it only for statistics

With the introduction of the EQF and the associated process to arrive at an NQF in all interested countries, the use of this framework quickly became popular. Within formal education, nationally and especially internationally, documents and communications – including within the European Commission – simply refer to the levels of the EQF. It has therefore become a widespread standard.

In addition, every government wants to use all kinds of statistics surrounding education to know what the effects are of interfering with it. This is certainly important when it comes to spending the budgets that a government has available for all sectors. People would like to see it lead to a population that is expected to be increasingly highly educated. This can be done through formal education, but it can also be done through additional education and training. Those who drop out during formal training should also be 'appreciated' for what has been achieved.

That's why ISCED exists. It is the reference 'international classification for organizing education programs' and related qualifications by levels and fields. ISCED 2011 (levels of education) has been implemented in all EU data collections since 2014, and ISCED-F 2013 (fields of education and training) since 2016.

It means that two systems are, as it were, intertwined. Many countries now only state the NQF level on the formal diplomas, and then do nothing with the ISCED in that sense. One consequence is that formal training courses are given a ranking. Then, for example, level 5 is 'higher' than level 4, and this affects the perception of the status of a course among the target groups, such as young people, parents, employers and also politicians. So nothing can be done about that, even though all levels have their own descriptors and value for the 'world of work'.

5.3 Post-secondary 'in addition to' higher education: no further formal use

A situation that could possibly make everything more complex is that there is also talk about having 'post-secondary' education. This is especially the case in countries such as the US and Canada. But here in Europe too, the VET sector and the general education sector are included in secondary education. This opened the way for the providers of secondary education to call everything that was built on it, i.e. as an extension of it, 'post-secondary'.

Although higher education can be started with a secondary education diploma, in certain countries the VET sector wanted to put its own 'stamp' on the higher levels and maintain the connection with secondary education, certainly building on general education (think of the High School). But as mentioned, the VET sector subsequently did not opt in the last decade for the term 'Post', but for 'Higher'. So no 'Post VET' but 'Higher VET'.

A situation that is conceivable in that context, and this is actually how this concept of 'post-secondary' has been used, is that after having a diploma at level 4, there is still the possibility of obtaining additional, in-depth certificates, for units or small programmes. This means that everything remains at level 4 (or slightly above), and in order to make it distinctive from the formal courses, a concept such as 'post-secondary' is obvious.

This is easily conceivable within the system used for statistics, ISCED, for example to measure how many people receive additional training. Within the context of lifelong learning, this is also useful for the government to have insight into this. But as already indicated, the use of the EQF within education systems, together with the NQFs, can increasingly cause confusion about the use of levels and associated names and concepts. Choices will therefore have to be made and these now lead to focusing only on the use of the EQF and the NQFs.

Part II PROPOSALS

In this section we list the proposals we have in mind. Explanations are provided. However, there may be an overlap with what was discussed in part 1. Certain matters are also briefly repeated or summarized in a certain context. This can prevent the need to work with references.

6.1 In general

Based on what has been outlined above in terms of developments, intentions, plans and possibilities for the international design of the education system, we would like to make a number of proposals that are in line with this. These are thoughts that we can discuss with all partners, stakeholders and other organizations who believe that a clear approach to having transparency internationally is a priority for the coming years.

These proposals are therefore mainly about seeking such a transparency for the supply of qualifications at levels 5 and higher of the EQF. But the combination with the system at levels up to and including 4 is also taken into account. As mentioned above, an initiative has also been put forward through the European Parliament to harmonize the European system for the VET sector, which can actually be seen as an attempt to follow the same path as what we call the Bologna Process for higher education. An EEA can therefore serve as a kind of 'umbrella' for 'everything'.

International context is leading for the process

Before we make the proposals, it is good to emphasize again that this concerns the international context for having an education system. That context can serve as a reference for the national

systems, but it is and remains the responsibility of the national government to shape its own system and whether or not to choose to join all kinds of international agreements.

We also realize that the proposals mean that a lot of consultation and persuasiveness is needed to get countries that want to participate in this form of streamlining of international agreements to the point where a project can be started to see how to achieve results. In addition, the Bologna process, the consultations on arriving at an EEA and possibly also giving an impetus for an EVETA, continue as usual.

We would therefore like to argue that this document and the proposals contained in it should be included in these developments. All kinds of cases can easily be investigated and dealt with in parallel.

6.2 Reasons and arguments

In fact, the publication of this document is for a very simple reason, namely that in the past twenty years a lot of attention has been paid to the development of the EHEA and subsequently the countries involved have not sufficiently realized that a lot of things are also in progress, within their own country without clear international frameworks.

With the introduction of the EQF and the growth of learning pathways beyond level 4 and especially the VET sector, the greatly increased opportunities for 'study migration' at all levels, in conjunction with an expansion of international labor market, has prompted the search for more international cooperation between providers of formal education.

It is good to consider the role of Erasmus+ for projects, the introduction of Centers of Vocational Excellence, the collaboration on designing learning paths using qualifications at level 5 and especially the growth of the supply at the higher levels of qualifications that build on what VET Colleges already provide in terms of education.

It also means that based on these developments, much can be achieved through forms of cooperation, using all types of qualifications that are formally linked to the higher levels of an NQF, and therefore also of the EQF. The confusion that can now be observed - as previously explained here in part I with various examples - can only be prevented if further agreements are made about the international education system, and primarily about the classification and names for the concepts to be used.

7.1 System (5 and above) in the international context – tertiary education area

The first proposal involves putting all types of qualifications (courses, programmes, pathways and the like) at EQF levels 5 and higher under the concept of 'tertiary', i.e. belonging to the 'Tertiary Education Area (TEA)'. We choose this name to emphasize the connection with the EQF.

We are thus saying goodbye to the concept of 'post-secondary' when it comes to courses that build on secondary education and in which various countries have tried in the past and also alongside the creation of the European Higher Education Area to create their own to shape the learning area. This was partly possible due to the use of the framework that fits the ISCED. Due to the international use of the EQF and therefore the NQFs, the time is ripe to adopt the use of its levels and the use of the term 'tertiary' is now expressly appropriate.

It means that qualifications that provide access to tertiary education fall under the secondary area. It is up to a country to determine how that area is further divided, partly taking into account the classification of courses and qualifications that are seen as belonging to the 'primary education area'.

So: Qualifications at levels 5 and above of the EQF fall under the 'Tertiary Education Area (TEA)'.

7.2 Classification of the Tertiary Education Area (TEA) and type of qualifications

The proposal is to make an explicit distinction between formal and non-formal qualifications. As indicated earlier, we mean that a formal qualification means that there is a form of management, control and involvement of the government at a national level. An important aspect of this is the way in which the internal and external systems for guaranteeing the quality of the qualifications themselves and of the providers. But we also look at everything that falls outside and how to deal with it.

Formal

The following two types of sub-areas for formal qualifications within the TEA are distinguished:

- Higher Education Area (HE Area / HEA)
- High Vocational-Professional Education Area (High VPE Area, HVPE Area).

Non-formal

For the non-formal offer of qualifications within the TEA, we propose to use the following international name for the sub-area:

- Business-Personal Education and Training Area (BPET Area).

This concerns all non-formal qualifications that can be linked to a level of the NQF and therefore to a level of the EQF.

All other qualifications

In addition, there are countless qualifications that do not fall under the concept of 'formal' and aren't or can't linked to a level of the NQF. It is clear that they all have their own value for individuals, companies, organizations, government plans and all kinds of target groups, but they derive this from different judgments. This can be done through a professional organization, an employers' association, an examination agency or a network of its providers.

We will not consider these qualifications here. The main reason is that we can and will use the EQF and the NQFs that have been accepted for all countries involved through the international EQF Advisory Board in which they are all represented. Moreover, in almost all cases these qualifications have a value that mainly applies nationally.

International qualifications

Then the so-called international qualifications also remain for us. These are qualifications that are provided by their providers in several countries on the basis of an identical programme and therefore with (almost) the same learning outcomes. The main reason for this is to match jobs, professions, functions and activities that are comparable in those countries. Additional (professional) requirements may be requested per country, but the substantive matters are equivalent.

There is (yet) no European organization, a 'European Coordination Point', that offers the opportunity to link an international qualification directly to a level of the EQF. This would mean that this qualification would also automatically be linked to all NQFs, but this does not have to be the same level, a 'conversion' that is determined nationally. Such an ECP will also not investigate this, because of the time burden this entails, as well as the need to continuously monitor everything. The consortium that manages an international qualification will therefore have to go through the required procedure in each country, in the current situation. Maybe there will be solution in the near future, knowing that some initiatives have been taken.

It may be possible that once there is more clarity around the Tertiary Education Area, further more general consultation will also take place about the positioning of the international qualifications.

7.2.1 Higher Education

Higher Education (HE) refers to the formal offering of qualifications (cycles) that falls internationally under the EHEA and has subsequently been translated by each country into an NHEA.

If a country has a unitary system, with a single type of provider, it is therefore referred to as this NHEA, which involves formal qualifications that fall under the concept of Higher Education (HE).

If a country has a so-called binary system for the NHEA, it is subdivided into:

- Professional Higher Education (PHE)
- Academic Higher Education (AHE).

In all cases, the maximum of four formal cycles agreed within the EHEA can be offered, depending on the choices a country has made and which institutions offer them. Within our proposals, these cycles always comply with the agreements made within the EHEA.

7.2.2 High Vocational-Professional Education

In addition to the HEA, all other formal qualifications are included in – what we have proposed - the High Vocational-Professional Education Area. The institutions involved in this therefore provide qualifications that fall under the concept of 'High Vocational-Professional Education (HVPE – High VPE)'.

These are qualifications that are linked to levels that can be traced back to levels 5 to 8 of the EQF and do not belong to an NHEA (and therefore not having a link with the EHEA).

This concept has been chosen because these qualifications can be built on secondary education, especially in a practical sense on VET. But there are also opportunities to use these qualifications to see how the labour market can be responded to at higher levels with clearly practically designed programs, often also using 'work-based learning'.

This means that they can also be 'variants' of what is offered within 'professional higher education'. To emphasize that this concerns levels 5 and higher, provided in parallel to an NHEA, often with a division into PHE and AHE, the combination of 'vocational' and 'professional' can be used internationally.

The use of 'High'

An introductory part of this document briefly discussed the use of 'high' in the concept of the HVPE Area. When it comes to 'Higher Education' it is clear that this description of that sector has become so entrenched that there is no possibility of moving away from 'higher', possibly implying that there are 'lower' qualifications.

Moreover, several countries have already joined in by offering national qualifications at level 5 and higher, formally and in parallel with national higher education. This was done by also talking about 'higher'. In order not to further sharpen the contrast with 'lower', a situation that is not really seen as convenient for many of the organizations involved, we opt for a form of ordering. This involves connecting to the higher levels of the EQF by just using 'high'.

Difference between 'higher' and 'tertiary'

A country is free to define its own national tertiary area. It happens that in that context certain qualifications are seen as 'higher education', without meeting all criteria agreed for the EHEA, especially when the English terms are used. It is therefore important to distinguish between 'higher education' and 'tertiary education'.

Vocational and Professional...

An important note in this situation is that in English a distinction can be made between the type of education, with vocational and professional, aimed at the labour market and part of 'the world of work'. So that is already anchored in the names.

But in many languages the distinction cannot be made and the national name for vocational and professional is the same. It may then be a useful option to add the concept of 'secondary' or 'tertiary' in the country itself. Of course, one can also use the English name in the national system, if there are no serious objections to this.

Providers of HVPE qualifications may include different legal entities. We will come back to that.

7.2.3 Types of HVPE qualifications (and about e.g. micro-credentials)

Here we would like to discuss the further implementation of HVPE based on the fact that its qualifications are linked to an NQF (and therefore indirectly to the EQF). The EHEA can be seen as a reference.

Within the EHEA as it is now designed within the Bologna process, it is established that qualifications, i.e. cycles, are used, which have a size and study load based on a number of credits. That size is always a multiple of 30 and almost always of 60 credits. It is up to a country to use the available bandwidth for its own EHEA, on the condition that the final level of a cycle complies with the associated so-called Dublin Descriptors.

An example is the Bachelor programme that can have 180, 210 or 240 credits. This is partly due to the previous education that is shorter in certain countries than in other countries and then the length of the total learning path is decisive. The SCHE programme can have 90 to 120 credits, also in combination with, for example, the Bachelor as a first cycle.

When designing the EQF, nothing was formally determined about the size and study load in clock hours of the qualifications. What matters is that the final objectives and learning outcomes meet

the EQF descriptors. These have their own characteristics, although in various countries they have been declared compatible with the Dublin Descriptors for the four cycles for levels 5 to 8.

This means that in practical terms it is not just about qualifications with a duration - so to speak - that is a multiple of half a year (a semester), full-time. All kinds of other designs are also possible.

Starting point High VPE: full-time qualifications

The proposal at this stage is to take first of all full-time qualifications, linked to the levels of the NQF, as the basis for the High VPE area. This means that these are courses that use full semesters when it comes to courses for young people. This can increase recognizability and comparability. Naturally, such a course can also be designed for other target groups, part-time, with work-based learning or with flexible learning paths that are spread over a longer period of time. Agreements can also be made for this where appropriate, in view of 'lifelong learning'.

In addition, another proposal is needed to take this 'framework' as a starting point for further flexibility and detailing of the offering within the High VPE area, with qualifications that have a different study load. This will be further elaborated in a separate document.

Micro-credentials

It can also be noted that many countries, with proposals made for this in an international context, have and are being made to include so-called micro-credentials (MC) within an NHEA. This often concerns one's own interpretation of the positioning of the MC, namely being part of a formal training course, possibly slightly adapted to the target group. The complete training is therefore the 'macro level'. This means that credits can also be awarded to a MC where appropriate, with the accreditation of the formal training as a guarantee of quality. This will also be looked at for the HVPE area, in a specific document.

7.3 Formal and non-formal...

In principle, an infinite number of qualifications can be linked to an NQF in a country - if the government makes this possible and the NQF is not only used for formal education and training, i.e. the qualifications for which a form of national control is applied.

It is then up to the same government to (soon) determine which qualifications and which providers require such formal training within the HVPE Area. This means that there must be a system within which these qualifications are determined and approved, especially if there is some form of government funding. This also applies an automatic system whereby the qualifications are classified into that NQF independently of the National Coordination Point for the NQF, as is also the case for the cycles in the NHEA.

What is discussed in this document applies in principle to formal training and education. But of course there are also non-formal courses that are classified at the same levels as formal courses and also have a comparable study load. However, they do not fall under the system that the government uses for quality assurance and must therefore receive their own treatment. We place them in the Business-Personal Education and Training (BPET) Area, as discussed later.

7.4 Especially levels 5 and 6 - affiliation with the NHEA

We therefore propose to fix the HVPE Area for levels 5 and higher. As mentioned, full-time qualifications can be linked to this, as is the case with formal HE qualifications, normally using 'semesters' of 30 credits.

But looking at the developments in the past that have led to the formation of a sector that was given the name Higher VET and, above all, built on the VET sector in a practical way, it must be recognized that the supply on and around the levels 5 and 6 should be further developed within the Tertiary Education Area (TEA).

It must also be taken into account that the flow from these levels to the cycles of the National HEA is seen as strategically important in many countries and therefore deserves a formal approach. This means that, as a result, providers of HVPE at these levels 5 and 6 can, must and may conclude cooperation agreements with HE institutions. This may also apply to the flow from HE to HVPE, so vice versa.

An important aspect here is the progression from the HVPE Area at level 6 to the second cycle, i.e. the Master. Certainly in the PHE Area within the EHEA, if it exists in a country within a binary system, there are quite a few options for that. It also means that a government must consider

whether it is logical to focus on transfer options from the HVPE Area at levels 5 and 6 to the NHEA, with clear and transparent agreements. This can prevent the creation of a third (sub-)sector in a country with a binary NHEA with qualifications at levels 7 and possibly also 8. If it is not necessary, such 'subdivisions' should be prevented.

But if a country has a unitary NHEA, it can be seen whether level 7 is an interesting option to develop certain types of training within the HVPE Area. This means that this area actually functions as the PHE Area as found within a binary system.

8 Use of instruments and common agreements

Agreements have been made within the EHEA on common instruments such as:

- a. Use of the term Cycle
- b. Use of the term Degree
- c. Dublin Descriptors for the levels
- d. Use of the terms Professional and Academic (within a binary system)
- e. European Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance, internal and external
- f. Basing the study load on the use of ECTS, and therefore credits (EC)
- g. Use of the diploma supplement, with a specific format.

This also explicitly demarcates the NHEAs. National authorities will without hesitation integrate these instruments into legislation and all associated regulations.

However, it does mean that there are opportunities to converse these instruments, so to speak, into instruments for other types of formal qualifications.

This means that the own characteristics of, for example, the HVPE Area can be preserved, with their own status and not as 'a derivative' of the EHEA.

A short list can already be drawn up in the same order as you think of the HVPE Area. But as already indicated, we will elaborate on this further in the other documents:

- a. Use of the concept 'Level' as an anchor point
- b. Use of the term 'diploma'
- c. EQF descriptors for levels 5 and above
- d. Use of the Vocational-Professional combination within the same sector
- e. HVPE Standards and Guidelines to be determined for quality assurance, internal and external
- f. Basing the study load on the use of HVPE credits, via a system yet to be determined
- g. Use of a diploma supplement, with a format that can be determined further.

It is of course advisable to look at the HE instruments as much as possible for inspiration (and not imitation), in order to optimize the progression and transfer to other qualifications, if there is added value for the student.

9 Institutions as providers of tertiary qualifications

We propose a classification when it comes to the whole of institutions and providers of tertiary qualifications and which therefore concerns the international context. The classification can serve as a reference for a national classification, especially if there is international cooperation and communication. But it is up to the country itself to see how this can affect national institutions and organizations.

It does mean that if institutions in a country want to occupy and use a place (status) in the international context, a choice must be made based on the proposed classification. This is partly about making the type of institution clearly visible, to immediately show clearly to all target groups where this provider can be positioned within the formal systems.

It is also up to a country itself to introduce further subdivision in the national context, just as a binary system for higher education is simply a national choice. There may be reason for further international subdivision in the coming years, including for the HVPE Area, but our proposal is to keep it simple at first to prevent further misunderstandings and improper use of terms, concepts and names.

We will then start working on a proposal for the classification when it comes to the institutions and international names within the European Tertiary Education Area.

9.1 HE – Higher Education and the Short Cycle

We first start with institutions that at least offer the 'first cycle' in the formal setting ('Bachelor'). It is up to a country to determine which institutions may also provide the 'second cycle' ('Master'), as well as the 'third cycle' (PhD, Doctorate).

Subsequently, the 'short cycle' does not entail a national obligation to be offered, although it fully meets the same criteria within the EHEA. But if it is offered, it is up to the country to determine what the formal position of the SCHE is within the NHEA and who the provider is.

There are two options:

- The SCHE is offered by an HE institution that also provides at least the first cycle, in some connection with it.
- The SCHE is (also) offered by HE institutions that only (in the formal context, as an institution with its own entity) formally offer this short cycle and, on the basis of national agreements, collaborate with the HEIs that offer at least the first cycle.

With the first option, it should be noted that a Higher Education Institution may not offer the SCHE itself, but have it provided by another institution on the basis of issuing a 'license'. This means that the other institution is not the formal owner of it and can never be seen as a HEI on this basis. The program, examination, quality assurance and issuing the diploma always remain in the hands of the license provider.

Short Cycle and an international common name: Associate

We will come back to this separately later, but in order to be able to fully provide the names for higher education institutions, here is our proposal to give the Short Cycle an international name: 'Associate'.

This means that only HEIs that formally offer the SCHE may use that name for this degree (cycle) and conversely that if no name Associate is used, it is not formally a HEI. This therefore increases transparency.

Providers with at least the first cycle - and names

Here we make a proposal for the names of institutions that are allowed to provide higher education, i.e. a HEI. We are giving a new, umbrella name to the institutions that provide professional higher education within a binary system.

- If there is a unitary system:
 - *University (U)*
- If there is a binary system:
 - *University of Professional Education and Research (UP) – for institutions and providers of Professional Higher Education*
 - *University (U) – for institutions and providers of Academic Higher Education*

It should be noted that the choice of the 'name' UP is based on the growth in the use of all kinds of names within the EHEA, without there being a broad consensus regarding a specific name. Before the Bologna Process started, the name Polytechnic was mainly in vogue and there are still countries that rely on this for the national name.

An important new name is that of the University of Applied Sciences, a proposal that emerged from a European project with a number of countries that concluded in 2007. But there are also countries and regions that indicate that the most commonly used additions to the formal degrees in higher education are: 'of Science' and 'of Arts'. This would, as it were, forget an important part of the EHEA. A most recent attempt to overcome this is the use of the name 'Applied Higher Education Institution (AHEI)'. But this is also a relatively vague name, which does not make it clear that some research is also being done.

Because many countries, but also at European level, are striving for a fully-fledged positioning in a binary system for providers of PHE and AHE, it is believed that the term 'University' should appear in both names. So when the proposal for the UAS emerged in 2007 and no initiative was taken within the Bologna process to achieve some form of harmonization - partly due to the fact that ministers must be prepared to do so - more and more countries gradually adopted the name embraces UAS without further consultation in order to 'communicate' with each other.

It subsequently turned out that there are countries whose legislation also makes it possible to use names such as University of Fine Arts, University of Health Care, University for Music and Theater and the like. The principle is that the addition refers to the professional field.

To avoid further discussions, our proposal is to now grab the momentum by using a more general and umbrella name, i.e. 'University of Professional Education and Research (UP)'. The term 'Professional' refers to the positioning in the EHEA.

It is also possible to work with 'additional names', which can also be stated on the diplomas and in the diploma supplements. To give an example:

University of Professional Education and Research
Institution for Fine Arts

It is of course up to each country to determine which national name is used in the national language if the English name is not also in use nationally, possibly to be used in all kinds of networks. But we hope that a discussion about this will be started within the Bologna process in the not too distant future. Until a decision has been made, we will use 'UP'.

Institutions having just only the Short Cycle HE

As indicated above, the standard situation for HEIs is that at least the first cycle, the Bachelor, is provided. That has been the case from the beginning of the Bologna Process. However, with the formal inclusion of the SCHE in the EHEA in 2018, all countries have had to further consider its position.

The countries that had already included the SCHE in their NHEA before 2018 did so in connection with the first cycle. This was because of the 2005 SCHE 'definition' that was embraced during an initial discussion within the Bologna Process: 'linked to - or - within the first cycle'.

From 2018 onwards, this also meant a reason for a reorientation of the position for those countries. For example, the SCHE can (also) be embedded in the NHEA separately from the Bachelor. There were (in addition to abolishing it again, but that is not happening) two options for the SCHE: leave it where it already was, i.e. at the HEIs (possibly with a more individual positioning and bundling) or remove it there and place it in an independent higher education institution.

The countries that had not yet given the SCHE any place in their NHEA could also consider what the best option was at that time. Of course, one could also continue to not offer it (several countries have also taken that decision as such, for all kinds of reasons). But it also provided the options that existing providers had: placing it in a HEI or providing a new type of HEI for providing the SCHE.

In connection with this, it must of course always be considered how those in possession of a formal SCHE diploma can continue studying for the Bachelor's degree. The Dublin Descriptors state that the HEIs must organize their programmes in such a way that progression to a higher level is possible. In the constructions mentioned above, scenarios can be devised for this and underlying co-operation agreements can be drawn up.

It appears that there is a development underway to bundle the range of qualifications for the SCHE, i.e. the 'Associate' if we can start using that name in an international context. This can be done in a country by having an independent institution for this purpose, i.e. with its own entity. In that case, the proposal is to use the following international name: *Associate College*.

It is like having within the NHEA with a binary system of a University of Professional Education and Research (UP) in the formal context of the EHEA.

It is therefore immediately clear to all target groups that it is a provider of the formal Short Cycle HE and something like this can only be welcomed very much.

But it may well be that the government does not want this after all, having its own institution for the formal training courses that fall under the SCHE. This also means that within the HEI the range of SCHE qualifications is bundled in a certain way. But then there is no situation that can be regarded as structural. It is up to this HEI to use a specific name for the relevant part (department, academy, etc.) where appropriate if it is believed that this is important in communication. Such a component can be designed in its own region or with its own location.

This construction can also be used for collaboration with, for example, VET Colleges, with further agreements about the provision of the program. Specific licenses or contracts can be used.

There will therefore be scenarios where a country has simply not introduced the SCHE and may not do so in the short term, despite all international developments. It may mean that growth to level 5 within the tertiary system from, for example, the VET sector or in other ways must be recognized by the HEIs and that agreements can be made with the relevant providers where relevant.

Associate College (AC) advancement at a unitary system in an NHEA

It may therefore be the case at some point that the following situation exists in a country with a unitary system for higher education:

- University – for the first, second and third cycle
- Associate College – for the short cycle

We continue to formally speak of a unitary system since that division fits the offering of at least the first cycle.

But a government may then have the option of formally offering an AC the opportunity to provide education that meets the criteria for the first cycle. This is possible because of the pressure from employers not to force Associate degree owners to move on to the first cycle of the University in the event of advancement. A 'practically completed' first cycle can therefore be developed in line with the Associate.

As such, this happens parallel to the University. The result is that, as it were, a University of Professional Education and Research (UP) is added to the NHEA, through a growth process.

However, the government then has two choices:

- It is actually decided to convert an AC to an UP, for the short and first cycle, based on agreements about cooperation with the Universities and the flow from the first cycle to the second cycle.
This has created a binary system, with specific agreements.
- Converting an AC to an UP is done for part of the existing range of ACs. This means that AC, UP and U coexist, but still in a formal sense within a binary system.

We would like to emphasize that these are possible future scenarios. But we can also note that in a country like Canada this movement was initiated a number of years ago, under pressure from the labour market. Employers, in particular, wanted to focus on the more practical interpretation of higher education. So, it is not unrealistic to consider these types of changes and developments, especially as a government.

9.2 High VPE – High Vocational-Professional Education and levels

Within the HVPE Area, levels 5 to 8 can be offered, depending on the choices made in a country. This often concerns levels 5 and 6. The following classification can be considered:

- Offering only HVPE-5
- Offering HVPE-5 and HVPE-6.

Only offering HVPE-6 in the formal context is of course an option, but we do not include it in this document.

9.3 High VPE and the name of the provider

It is important to choose a clearly distinguishable name for the type of institution that offers HVPE. Our proposal is:

- *HVPE Institute*

This also makes a clear distinction between the concept of VET College, for levels up to and including 4 (see why below) and, for example, the Associate College within the EHEA.

9.4 Position of a HVPE Institute

Various forms of positioning can be distinguished for a HVPE Institute. It is up to a country itself to determine which form best suits the existing education system and how the target groups can best benefit from it. We give the options here, with a brief explanation.

1. The HVPE Institute has an independent legal entity and as such is included in the national education system within tertiary education, with a form of autonomous action and with its own administration.
2. The HVPE Institute does have its own status within tertiary education in a country, with its own regulations that result from this, but the HVPE Institute is formally housed in a legal entity with a VET College, with an umbrella board for both components. This offers the opportunity to act under the management of that entity within the frameworks for VET up to and including level 4 and also for HVPE for levels 5 and higher.

If there are already providers for VET up to and including level 5 (and possibly higher), they should in principle consider whether such an 'internal' division is possible and what advantages this provides, including for international projects and the budgets.

Naturally, all kinds of forms of collaboration are possible in which a HVPE Institute is involved. This is possible with higher education providers or specifically an Associate College. This often involves connecting to each other's qualifications and shaping progression to a higher level.

Both classifications offer the opportunity to determine how qualifications with a certain orientation are embedded in the whole. It can therefore be more practical or theoretical, partly in view of the progression to a higher level, and specifically to a higher education course.

9.5 HVPE Institute and types of qualifications

The first thought was and is of course that a HVPE Institute is there to offer formal qualifications that are based - in the full-time form - on a semester and a year format. A training course lasts, for example, 2 years. We therefore use that design in this document as a basis for the proposals.

But it is also clearly visible that there is a need to offer parts of these courses. By this we do not mean the qualifications that are linked to an NQF in the non-formal context, because they have their own status and providers, mainly found in the private market for training, i.e. at the BPET (see below). Of course, formal education institutions may be involved, but we want to make the distinction clear.

Within a HVPE Institute, parts of formal qualifications can therefore be offered, also as short independent courses. They can also be 'narrow' parts, thinking about what is going on with micro-credentials. We will discuss this in a separate document in this series, with a number of proposals, specifically for the offer at levels 5 and 6.

Naturally, this also plays a role within the EHEA, with plans for a specific approach for micro-credentials. We will also pay attention to this in that document.

10 Business-Personal Education and Training (BPET) – non-formal qualifications

As mentioned earlier, another area within the TEA can also be reserved for non-formal training and qualifications that derive their status from being linked to a level of the NQF. This means that this area is explicitly determined and organized nationally.

We propose to refer to this area in the international context as 'Business-Personal Education and Training (BPET).

This mainly concerns qualifications that are provided in the private context by all kinds of providers (possibly also with a connection with providers of formal education). They are strongly linked to specific goals such as educating workers, providing targeted and profession-related training, in-company training and other forms of education that help people shape a career or personal development.

In order to properly delineate the whole, BPET has therefore opted for a link to an NQF and thus indirectly to the EQF. The other non-formal forms of education, training and education have their own dynamics and characteristics. These cannot be captured in a single format, partly because it is often impossible to determine what the level is, how the quality can be controlled formally and externally and the providers can be found in all shapes and sizes in a country.

This will be discussed further in another document, so as not to hinder discussions about the formal classification. But the fact that further consideration is necessary has to do with the further introduction of the micro-credentials that fall under the non-formal system.

11 Level 5 Area

All analyzes show that qualifications at level 5 of the EQF, including the SCHE (which in some countries is not linked to the NQF, but is only part of the NHEA), can play a key role in shaping the start-up phase of the tertiary education area. It is also the phase in which bridges can be built between secondary education and tertiary education, especially when it comes to the VET sector.

In case that a country chooses not to offer a SCHE within the NHEA, in a formal sense and based on the applicable criteria for the EHEA, it must be considered how 'the gap' can be filled. This can be done by offering HVPE, but also with other types of training that can be linked to an NQF, at level 5. But cooperation agreements are always necessary between the providers and the HEIs. This can certainly be complicated, to be able to fill in the continuous learning paths periodically.

That is why CHAIN5, founded for this purpose in 2013, has put a lot of energy in recent years into seeing how the 'National Level 5 Area' is developing in various countries. In connection with this, it is important to consider to what extent more attention to the design of a European 'Level 5 Area' can contribute to further fleshing out and updating those NL5As. Use can be made of the experiences gained in other countries, with good examples.

Naturally, this European L5A is in line with what has been and will be agreed for the entire Tertiary Education Area (TEA), as discussed and proposed in the previous texts. It is therefore not the intention to develop a completely unique 'strategy' for the L5A, but because this allows bridges to be built between the various (sub)sectors in secondary and tertiary education, it seems wise to continue to work on this.

12 Degrees and names.... how about that for HVPE?

From the start, the EHEA has opted to use the term 'cycle' to indicate the level. This was obvious at the time given that the EQF did not yet exist.

The concept of 'first cycle' was used for the first level. It was already known at that time that there were courses that last one and a half to two years, but these were ignored at that time. When it was decided in 2005 to do something about this, a solution had to be found for the appropriate concept. 'Zero Cycle' was not an option and as a compromise, 'short cycle' was chosen, although the 'first cycle' was not seen as the 'long cycle' or 'full cycle'.

In line with all this, it has been decided to use the term 'degree' for the four cycles. This is a fairly exclusive situation, meaning that only higher education can and may grant degrees to those who have completed a formal education.

Although it is not based on a general decision by the countries involved, it has been accepted that international common names for the degrees circulate. These are the Bachelor, Master and PhD (Doctorate) and, if one decides, the Associate.

The question now is whether there is a need to use comparable names for the HVPE Area. If so, how? We will discuss this separately in another document in this series.

PART III The TEA as a whole and the Level 5 Area

13 Schemes: Tertiary Education Area and Level 5 Area

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

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

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

Ideas for international common names and terms

A closer look at the subdivision of tertiary education

Chapter 2

1 Introduction

In this document, as part 2 of the series, we will look further at the division of the 'tertiary education area' as proposed in part 1. This involves a classification that fits the international positioning of all kinds of sectors, with the associated qualifications.

2 TEA (Tertiary Education Area)

We concluded part 1 with the diagram below, to show how the proposals regarding the positioning of the underlying sectors and areas work out:

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

For the sake of clarity, we provide here the explanations of the abbreviations and terms used, with a brief explanation.

- Tertiary Education Area (TEA) = the general name for the area available for offering formal or non-formal qualifications and which is divided into a number of sectors (areas), on the basis of which the position and status of a provider can be determined in the international context.
- EQF = European Qualifications Framework, as a framework with eight levels for the possible positioning of formal and usually also non-formal qualifications. The NQFs are derived from this, based on national agreements.
- European Higher Education Area (EHEA) = the sector resulting from the Bologna Process for higher education, with matching instruments.
- HE = Higher Education, a term that we use without further addition for the type of education that falls under the agreements within the EHEA, i.e. the Bologna Process, and is in a unitary context provided by a University.
- PHE = Professional Higher Education, provided within a binary national HEA by what we like to call: University of Professional Education and Research
- AHE = Academic Higher Education, provided within a binary national HEA, provided by a University.
- HVPE = High Vocational-Professional Education, at least with formal qualifications.
- BPET = Business-Personal Education and Training, with non-formal qualifications linked to a NQF, a sector covered in a separate document.
- Cycle = the concept used within the EHEA to indicate the level, based on the associated descriptors; a country can determine that these are not the levels of the NQF as such, so that it has its own National HEA with cycles.

2.1 Classification of national institutions based on this

The overview offers the opportunity to make international agreements about the positioning of providers in a specific country, i.e. institutions that provide qualifications that fall under tertiary education as a whole. The government of that country has complete freedom to organize this education system for EQF levels 5 and higher, based on what has grown in recent years and may have been adjusted periodically. This situation will certainly have to be respected in order to do justice to the

evolving situations and designs of the underlying sectors. Coherence with the sectors in secondary education is also crucial, so as not to 'disrupt' all learning paths and connections.

With this diagram and associated documents, we are in any case making a proposal to all countries that want to join in with our thoughts and plans to arrive at an international process for the HVPE Area, including the design of the international 'Level 5 Area' that cuts across goes through all sectors (see below).

2.2 Proposal Process for HVPE and Level 5

The proposal means that we are reaching out to each country to conduct a study to determine to what extent its own national tertiary education system fits in with the international scheme proposed here. At some point we can take care for a proposal for that research so that all interested countries can carry out it in a comparable manner. A small international committee will guide this further (as we have proposed in document 1).

As can now be seen, the investigation will involve the following steps:

- It is assessed for each national sector within the tertiary education area where it best fits into the international scheme based on a comparison with the criteria used, a form of 'best fit'.
- If it turns out that a particular national sector can be found in two sectors of this international scheme, which can be substantiated in a clearly substantive manner, then both will be noted.
- If the sector can be clearly positioned, the national providers of the qualifications within the associated international sector will be considered for the research as institutions with the international name that we use in the context of our proposals.
- If it turns out that certain national providers can be found in two international sectors, it is proposed to make a division within the national context. This can be formally arranged, with different legal entities under the same management, in order to make it clear in which context formal action takes place, if applicable. Further frameworks for this will be provided in the research proposal.
- The results of this research will be included in a report per country, together with an analysis of the entire situation.
- An international conference can then be held at which the results will be discussed. All countries are invited to take note of the state of affairs.
- On this basis, the proposed process will be initiated to develop the HVPE Area as such at an international level.
- The Level 5 Area is examined in connection with this, with its own process.

So it actually means, as indicated for the research, that every educational institution in a country can indicate in which box of the international scheme it can be found, in whole or for a certain recognizable part. It would be great if, in the long term, such an individual institution could clearly use positioning in international communication and in all kinds of partnerships.

3 A number of additional topics

Here we will first briefly discuss a few additional matters when it comes to this division of the tertiary education area, in order to also provide some form of clarification as to what is or is not intended by the diagram.

3.1 Cross-overs and collaboration

We have already indicated that all this cannot be viewed separately from situations in which an institution cannot be clearly positioned as such. So that must also be recognized and respected. During such a process, as announced, we will consider to what extent a form of differentiation within the proposed classification is useful, without affecting transparency.

A few examples, which will be discussed later:

- An institution for formal education, such as for HVPE, may also be involved in offering non-formal education and training, specifically in the private setting. It does depend in part on the legislation and regulations in a country whether these fall under the same administration or whether there are separate but highly cooperating entities.
- A VET College is involved in formal education up to level 4 and then also offers HVPE qualifications at level 5. This means that there is a formal combination of a VET College and a HVPE

Institute, under one Board. This means they can operate independently of each other, also on projects and the like.

3.2 University

We speak of a University as an institution within higher education in both a unitary and a binary system. But its design can of course differ:

- In a unitary higher education system, a University offers both academically and professionally oriented programmes and courses, in combination with all kinds of research. This also offers the opportunity as a University to sharply position its focus in the offering itself.
- In a binary higher education system, the University will be explicitly focused on academic education and the associated research. The University of Professional Education and Research (UP) is focused on relevance for the labour market and therefore offers courses that rely heavily on learning outcomes associated with professional profiles. The associated research has a strong practical and applied approach with matters that are directly applicable in a specific context. Conducting research into trends, innovations and other developments are also strongly related to what is going on in the world of work and in education.

3.3 Level 5 Area

For the sake of completeness, we provide here a diagram for what we call the international Level 5 Area. We will discuss this further in a separate document.

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

4 The entire education system briefly considered

In our documents and plans we talk about 'tertiary education', starting at level 5. This approach is partly based on the decision after the introduction of the EQF and the further expansion and positioning of the EHEA in 2013 to view level 4 as the highest level necessary for entry into higher education.

That decision was actually accepted without a fight by all countries, mainly because there was not much else to choose from. But with the further introduction of the NQFs, the development of the Short Cycle HE and especially the growth of the parallel sector at levels 5 and higher (HVPE as we call it), we are now confronted with certain consequences.

4.1 General education

Every country has a sector that falls under 'general secondary education'. The qualifications offer the opportunity to progress to a higher education programme or – if this option is formally regulated nationally – to a HVPE programme. We will not go into this now as general education up to and including level 4 has specific characteristics in each country and it therefore makes no sense to do anything with it internationally at this stage and within the process we have outlined.

Naturally, in such a process, all this will have to be examined for the possible effects on general secondary education. A government can consider a national system as a whole when it comes to adjustments. Other countries can also 'watch' and perhaps gain inspiration.

4.2 VET from 4 to 5...

In many countries, especially with a unitary higher education system, efforts have been made at an early stage to expand the VET sector to higher levels. A Level 5 qualification could also be included in that national VET sector, but to emphasize its status it was placed under the concept of 'Higher VET'. This was an attempt to profile itself alongside higher education. However, not every country uses the term HVET and often has its own name, although an international description was and still is not available.

As mentioned earlier, governments have often chosen an English name themselves, often after limited consultation of similar situations in other countries – and not having an independent source for this.

In the current era, however, it is more useful to focus more on the specific character of this rapidly growing sector and thus bridge the gap between VET and HE, but also show that graduates can work in a broad context. Moreover, this sets us apart from the non-formal qualifications at the higher

levels, which are strongly focused on the professional world of work and are strongly demand-driven with all kinds of customization. HVPE qualifications have a strong personal development component and can therefore be aimed at multiple sectors and functions.

Again, that is why we have chosen the sector name 'High Vocational-Professional Education', i.e. HVPE of High VPE.5

5 Topics that will be discussed separately later

The proposal generally affects the international organization of tertiary education and associated training. It offers all countries the opportunity to see whether it is useful to join in where this is not yet the case and whether adjustments offer more opportunities for international cooperation.

But the formal system still contains 'all kinds of things' when it comes to the layout and design. It is necessary to make the process as simple as possible in the beginning and gradually consider which aspects of tertiary education also require attention. Here are a few issues that we will not discuss here in detail further.

5.1 Public-funded and private-funded

What is outlined here with the diagram relates to formal qualifications (HE and HVPE, with the involvement of the government and associated organizations) and non-formal qualifications (BPET via a link to an NQF). Although the BPET sector mainly focuses on private providers, it is of course the case that formal training courses can be offered by both government-funded and private institutions. That depends on the context offered by the government and legislation. The precondition is that they all meet the same requirements.

In our proposals we currently make no distinction between publicly funded and private. In the next phase of the process we suggest, this can be further elaborated on certain points, if it is crucial for setting up an education system.

5.2 Fulltime and Lifelong Learning

We use a structure in our proposals in which the education, training and other qualifications are organized on a full-time basis. But as mentioned earlier, as an educational system it also forms the basis for other scenarios when it comes to organization. Part-time formats are possible and also formats that combine work and study. We will also consider these options in subsequent phases.

Adopting an approach that relates to lifelong learning, i.e. for education for adults, workers and other groups who want to receive training at a later age, is also a point of attention. Opportunities for this are often sought within a country using the same system that underlies an educational system. But other scenarios are increasingly being sought, especially with certificates linked to an NQF. All providers of formal training can play a role in this, if it can be done in a very transparent manner.

5.3 Work-based learning and apprenticeships

There are many options for completing and shaping qualifications within the sectors that can be distinguished within tertiary education. Full-time programs are therefore often considered, within initial formal education, aimed at young people before they start working in a job. Offering part-time education is also always an option, to study alongside work, for certificates, short programs and full courses.

In addition, there are many countries that have built up a system over the years, especially within the VET sector, which is characterized by a mix of studying and working. You can call it work-based learning, but also having a 'dual system'. The business community is explicitly involved in this.

But different scenarios are possible when it comes to this approach. Particularly for level 5 of an NQF, in line with the VET sector, it can be seen that developments are taking place to implement the 'national level 5 area' in a certain way. Here are a few constructions, within the entire spectrum:

- Having a job at a company and combining this during the study (status: apprenticeship)
- Being a student and doing part-time 'work' at a company (status: internship)
- Following a course of study, with student status, and doing certain components at a company, during a large part or all of a program (status: dual education).

We will certainly start working on it within the process once the general framework has been accepted as a starting point and offers opportunities for further development of international cooperation.

6 Aspects to include

As already indicated, what is proposed is a very tough challenge, with extremely complex constructions. Then it is not so much about the scheme itself, but about getting the countries that also participate in the EHEA to think about this. If the difference between the international proposal and the national structure is relatively large and may not be bridged so quickly, there must be room in the process to exchange ideas about this and to see what steps can still be taken.

Here we provide a number of aspects that may also be included in the process somewhat independently of the schedule. In addition, and this is well known, sub-development processes can be set up. This allows work to be done on specific aspects that can only be introduced into the main process at a suitable time in a later phase.

6.1 Continuous learning paths

Within tertiary education, there are many learning paths that can be outlined, vertically within a sector and horizontally (and 'obliquely') from one sector to the other.

These may be learning paths that are included in the regulations in a certain formal way, such as admission requirements, granting exemptions, the use of 'credits', bridging pathways, and so on. The fact that the 'orientation' is different may also play a role, such as in a binary higher education space. Examples include:

- Transfer from PHE to AHE, in the first year
- Progression from a Bachelor in PHE to a Master in AHE.

Another well-known example is the progression from level 5 to level 6, often found within the PHE sector, i.e. with the Short Cycle to the Bachelor.

But they are often also the result of agreements made for courses and programmes at different levels. This of course happens within the institutions themselves, as a result of the policy formulated by their management. But in addition, institutions in regions can see where they can collaborate on continuous learning paths.

The latter option can also include arrangements that are arranged across national borders in a country or region. This is therefore an international construction and it is important that national education systems are coordinated. Experiences with this can also be included in the process.

6.2 Similarities with 'links'

A construction that is also emerging has to do with linking courses at different levels, but by skipping an intermediate level. This is an approach that can be observed in countries where the Short Cycle HE has not been introduced in the formal sense and where other formal qualifications at level 5 are also struggling. This can be seen when the organizations involved offer programmes on the basis of projects for holders of a diploma at level 4 and who progress to level 6. An example of this is combining an apprenticeship with obtaining certificates at level 5. are deemed to be. In other words, they are certificates that build on level 5, without a formal classification with the NQF.

There are then two scenarios:

- At the end of the process, someone can enroll in a PHE institution, based on exemptions that can be derived from obtaining the certificates.
- Those who do not achieve everything can receive a statement as proof of having completed an 'apprentice' process.

Actually, level 5 is locked up in this. It is a construction that must be examined and included in the process.

6.3 Formal arrangements

There are countries where the government determines within the system which cooperation structures can lead to continuous learning paths. The sectors have been named and also the target groups - if they complete certain qualifications. The regulations establish the rights of holders of diplomas when it comes to how the study can be continued.

This may mean that a substantial reduction must be granted to the person concerned based on the acquired competencies and the associated study load. This is especially important when it comes

to different sectors. It is a lot easier to arrange this within the same sector, and therefore also within institutions.

There are also examples of countries where the sectors differ so much that only some of the previously acquired competencies can be capitalized on in the formal setting.

All this together is also a reason to consider, within the international context, how continuous learning paths from one country to another and possibly also with the involvement of different areas somehow fit into agreements. We think that some form of harmonization of the international tertiary education area can certainly help with this.

7 How to use this...

In the above sections of this document we have provided more information about the use of the proposed scheme and the process that can be initiated based on it. Reference has also been made to all kinds of issues that will undoubtedly play a role if we zoom in more on the sectors, the designs and the constructions that are required for this.

Once again, this is a proposal regarding the international organization within tertiary education, with all kinds of sectors and names for terms and concepts. It is up to each country to determine where there are differences (whether an investigation is required) and what the possibilities are to participate in the process. This may differ per country, partly depending on the policy regarding internationalization and cooperation with other organizations, institutions and platforms.

The agreements regarding the EHEA will simply continue to exist within this proposal, as agreed within the Bologna process. If changes take place there, we will also consider what this could mean for the other sectors. In this way we want to create a dynamic whole system.

The same applies to the Level 5 Area. Precisely because this cuts across all sectors, it is crucial for CHAIN5 to keep our fingers on the pulse of as many people as possible. The bridging function that a national L5A can play is clear, and that is why this attention is needed.

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

Levels within the HVPE Area

Chapter 3a

1 Introduction

This document looks separately at the levels within the intended HVPE Area. It is about making clear how within that structure an approach is possible at an international level and, derived from this, the national approach.

2 Use of levels... and how many

It could well be that the HVPE Area opts for strong detail when it comes to the number of levels. This in itself is not surprising because there are countries such as Ireland that have an NQF with more than 8 levels. Several levels can also be distinguished within a VET sector. The main reason for this is the demand from the world of work and the availability of a structure of functions and associated activities, i.e. competences, within the labour market.

Nevertheless, our proposal is to make a choice that is in line with the EQF and the classification that can be made possible. That means the following:

- There are four levels for the international HVPE Area;
- This concerns levels 5, 6, 7 and 8 of the EQF;
- Nationally, the NQF can be linked to these levels for one's own High VPE qualifications;
- These are formal qualifications, i.e. there is some form of government involvement in a certain way;
- The descriptors for the levels are those of the EQF and national of the NQF, based on the agreements made internationally on the mutual recognition of the level of a qualification.

In document 3b we further discuss the learning paths that can be designed on this basis. Subsequently, in document 4, a proposal is made for further flexibilization of the HVPE Area with the use of certificates based on this classification and the learning paths.

3 Names for the levels

The EHEA uses the concept of 'cycle'. Anyone who successfully completes a cycle is entitled to use a 'degree'. It is up to a country itself to give it a name, with a further addition if necessary. As is known, the most used international names are: Associate, Bachelor and Master, and PhD. A title may be associated with the latter.

There is a clear need to adopt the same approach for the HVPE Area, also internationally. But certainly nationally, thinking of Germany where the name 'Meister' is put forward. That is an extremely recognizable 'title' there, but translated into English it is 'Master'. In Flanders, the name for level 5 is 'Graduaat' and therefore it seems to be a reference to 'Graduate', which is level 7 in many countries. However, the English name for EQF level 5 in Flanders is Associate Degree.

The name is actually also an indirect reference to the level. This could be done with HVPE-5, HVPE-6, etc. But the link to the EQF is very direct and requires further explanation in many countries. Another option is to talk about: HVPE-A, HVPE-B, HVPE-C for levels 5, 6 and 7, and later look at level 8 separately. This sounds quite nice, as such, and also in line with what the EHEA has for the cycles: short, first and second, but a lot more neutral.

It is of course not a major issue at this stage when it comes to agreeing on 'international common names' for the HVPE Area. All of this will undoubtedly come up during the coming process. In the meantime, we propose to use neutral designations;

- HVPE-A – level 5 of the EQF
- HVPE-B – level 6 of the EQF
- HVPE-C – level 7 of the EQF.

As said, it will therefore be examined later how to deal with 'HVPE-D', as level 8.

4 Diploma

For the sake of clarity, we would like to indicate that these are programmes that are based on a number of semesters and especially years, for a full-time student. This means that those who successfully complete the course will receive a diploma, with a diploma supplement. So, it is not a certificate.

It is indicated above that we will search for names for the levels involved. The concept of 'degree' does not seem to us to be eligible for the HVPE Area, given the exclusive agreements within the EHEA on that point.

5 Involvement government in HVPE qualifications

If we look at the involvement of the government in a country in the design of an NHEA, it can be seen that it is quite strong. This is partly due to the Bologna Process, in which the ministers involved periodically consult with each other about what can be done together. This cohesion has diminished somewhat in recent years, but it is still the case that a lot of policy is being implemented nationally for the formal and especially publicly funded institutions.

It is therefore obvious to consider in the coming process for the HVPE Area what involvement the national governments intend. It could be a copy of the EHEA, but this ignores the uniqueness of this educational area and its link to all kinds of characteristics of the VET sector. This therefore requires a careful approach and, where possible, making combinations in the involvement of all kinds of (national) organizations in both educational systems and areas.

It is already clear in advance that joining the EHEA makes sense on all kinds of points. But we are also dealing with the experiences gained within the VET sector with, for example, ECVET and also EQAVET, as a quality assurance system for the VET sector. This means that the design of the High VPE Area will lead to a limitation of the accumulated strength of the VET sector. The experiences in countries that have been fighting the Higher VET sector for some time can make a very clear contribution to this. Naturally, these must be fitted into an international context.

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

Learning paths and differentiation within the HVPE Area

Chapter 3b

1 Introduction

This document of the series on the HVPE Area specifically discusses the learning paths that can be designed. The aim is to create a flexible system in order to best substantiate the choices that learners can make at the start of a study within High VPE.

This is a proposal that can be included in future discussions and also included in the process we have in mind. This is an international approach, such that each country can use it to determine what suits its own possibilities within national tertiary education.

2 Learning paths within the VPE Area around levels 5 and 6

As has been indicated elsewhere, our plans initially focus on levels 5 and 6, leading to HVPE-A and HVPE-B respectively. The other levels will be discussed at a later stage.

2.1 Differentiation in learning paths

The basis for flexibility within and with levels 5 and 6 is the following structure:

1. The programme that belongs to HVPE-A (level 5), as an independent qualification;
2. The programme that belongs to HVPE-B (level 6), as an independent qualification;
3. The programme that can be followed after obtaining HVPE-A, to obtain a HVPE-B diploma, and as such to be seen as an independent programme.

2.2 Differentiation within the final level (learning outcomes)

Levels 5 and 6 are discussed, but it is of course not about fixed programs for a particular field of study, with associated learning outcomes. Such a course will have a fixed core of units, in order to clarify its relevance for the labour market.

But in addition, providers work with: elective subjects, minors, specific projects and learning paths in the final phase of a course, as a 'graduation'. This allows them to respond to the variety of functions within the working field.

A distinction can also be made based on the programmes for certain target groups. For example, full-time students will be able to fill a starting position with the help of the diploma, and then possibly take courses, in-company training and other forms of training in addition to the job. These can also be higher level certificates.

But in addition, someone who has reached level 5 and wants to achieve level 6 as worker and taking a part-time course (we will discuss this below) can do this in a different context. This is possible because the variants such as full-time, part-time and work-based (dual) learning can have their own design and approach, within the general learning outcomes of the course. This means that this 'working student' can grow within a working environment to a position at a higher level, also with the appropriate qualities. It means that the freedom available for completing all kinds of units can be used specifically for this purpose. This also means that these positions are not primarily intended for graduates with HVPE-B, if they have followed the undivided route to this level.

In short, the system fits the situation on the labour market where individuals can get to a certain place via different routes. This can be as a graduate, without little work experience, but also as a worker who has further trained and can tackle specific issues within that place because of work experience. In this way, various learning paths within the HVPE Area can be used to respond flexibly to the demands of the labor market, also in the longer term.

2.3 Learning paths reviewed

These learning paths are further explained here.

1. HVPE-A

This is an independent programme of 1,5 to 2 years, with the regular full-time bandwidth, and is further dependent on the further organization of the national education system. It is a program at level 5 of the EQF and leads to a diploma.

2. HVPE-B

With a diploma at level 4, one can also opt for an independent HVPE programme of 3 to 4 years, leading to level 6, and therefore a diploma for HVPE-B. Here too, the length and embedding partly depend on the organization of the national education system.

3. HVPE-B via HVPE-A – with lateral inflow

An option that is normally used when there are parallel education sectors is the switch from one area to another, seen as a form of 'lateral entry' into the receiving program. All kinds of constructions are possible:

- There is an agreement between the institutions involved so that a large part of the exemption is granted.
- It may also be decided to have an assessment carried out by the receiving examination committee, leading to the determination of a program that still needs to be followed.
- There is a switch from one variant to the other. In that case, a separate agreement and an including procedure will be necessary, given the design.
- A minor will be set up within the HVPE-A course that is intended to streamline the transition to VPE-B.

4. HVPE-B via HVPE-A – with a completely independent follow-up/matching programme

This is the most interesting option. After obtaining the HVPE-A diploma, a so-called supplementary HVPE-B programme can be followed immediately or later. This is a programme that specifically builds on what has been done within HVPE-A and as such can be regarded as independently developed in the formal context. Registration for the HVPE-B course is required, but the programme can be seen as a 'graduation differentiation' with its own status within the HVPE course profile. It is therefore particularly suitable for part-time and dual institutions.

This means that in the event of changes within the HVPE-A course, the independent additional programme will also be adjusted, under the direction of the management of this course.

Both management teams will also be jointly responsible for this. The education team for the additional programme will also mainly consist of teachers who are also deployed for the HVPE-A training and education.

2.4 After HVPE-A continue with certificates

We will discuss this in a separate document in this series. It concerns the possibility for holders of a HVPE-A diploma to subsequently follow training based on pathways that lead to a certificate. This can happen at all levels, partly in view of the fact that within a position all activities and the required competencies do not have to be mastered at the same level. With a position at level 5, there may also be a need for some form of additional training at other levels, lower and higher. This does not always require full training, given its necessity for the job. Of course, a 'full diploma' can certainly fit in with personal development.

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

From Level 5 to Level 6

Chapter 3c

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 programme 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.

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

Specific situations – level 5 and SCHE

Chapter 3d

1 Introduction

In this part of the series we will briefly discuss a special option that exists in a number of countries. Finland is an interesting example of this. This involves offering a level 5 qualification, not to be seen as a Short Cycle or a VPE qualification with a duration of three to four semesters, in the full-time format, but as a top-up programme for those who have completed a VET diploma at level 4.

2 Status top-up VPE

This is often a programme that is offered to those who want to specialize after level 4. This can be done after working for a number of years to then see which programme suits the job, to be considered as a 'deepening' or 'broadening'. But there is also an option to take such a step in a dual form of working and learning, to be able to work as a 'specialist' at level 5.

In both cases there may be an opportunity to continue studying for a Bachelor's degree. It can of course also lead to a Short Cycle or a HVPE-A, but it is not obvious to have too much differentiated formats at level 5. The Bachelor's degree programme will often also have to be in a part-time or dual form, to offer working people the best chance of following a study programme.

An interesting scenario is to structure this programme, nominally taking one year, in such a way that the student can choose from a number of units. A clearly personal learning path can be set up. It is precisely such a programme that lends itself to a controlled form of flexibilization. The involvement of the world of work can be high, also because workers can take units that suit a company.

3 Position of such a programme

In one of the other documents (number 6) we sketch a picture of the structure of the HVPE Area, around levels 5 and 6. These are full programmes, with a bandwidth based on the use of 'VP Credits'. It is also indicated that a specific subdivision can be considered.

The most common scenario is that a two-year programme is divided into two one-year phases, with first a certain basic part that in itself also has a clear value within the country itself. Its status is therefore that of being a qualification between levels 4 and 5 of the EQF, but a country like Ireland has more than eight levels and can therefore make a more detailed division.

A common approach is to speak of:

- After 1 year: Higher Certificate
- After 2 years: Higher Diploma.

The use of the term 'Certificate' therefore refers to part of the formal program. This could mean that this is adopted when designing the HVPE Area, based on an international structure. Then consider:

- HVPE-A Diploma
- HVPE-A Certificate.

4 International approach

As indicated, such a classification mainly plays a role in the national context. But if institutions in different countries work together on these types of HVPE qualifications, they can reach bilateral agreements about the meaning of the subdivision. Furthermore, any holder of such a certificate can register at any institution and ask what its value is for a training course, i.e. by having the examination committee consider this.

Such subdivisions are often not included by the organizations that are asked for a country for the international diploma comparison. The national classification in the NQF can help, but even then the status of a certificate cannot always be clearly determined.

5 As part of the possible process for the HVPE Area

In the proposed process, we will initially look for a clear structure for the qualifications that have a certain and substantial scope. Once this has been determined, it can be seen which subdivision is useful in the international context and how more detail is needed within the countries themselves, without considering how similar constructions are needed in other countries.

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

Specific situations – level 5 and SCHE not being used – national approach

Chapter 3e

1 Introduction

In this short document we discuss a specific approach that can be taken by a country for positioning the Short Cycle HE, without calling it SCHE or using level 5 for it. There could be all kinds of reasons for this. The example is the Norwegian approach (situation 2023).

2 Reasons and construction

As is known, the SCHE was formally included in the EHEA in 2018, with the result that a country can work within the National HEA with four cycles. But there may be a situation where higher education wants to stick to the system with the three cycles, i.e. First, Second and Third. In certain cases, the SCHE is unfortunately seen as a form of downgrading or having a qualification with a lesser status, perhaps internationally.

But the government can also contribute and believe that a shorter programme, between 90 and 120 credits, can help for the accessibility of national higher education and making learning paths more flexible.

There may also be plans to offer qualifications at level 5 that do not belong to the NHEA in a formal sense, so to - as we propose in this series - the HVPE Area. This may in turn be a reason for providers in the NHEA to indicate that their short program will not be associated with level 5. It is thought that this may lead to confusion among future students.

In short, that would mean:

- There is a short programme within the NHEA.
- It is not formally declared as a SCHE as exists within the EHEA.
- Level 5 is not linked to it, as has been internationally agreed, but for the formal SCHE.

However, for that short program one can certainly use the instruments that also apply to the Bachelor, Master and PhD. This also includes working with the Dublin Descriptors for the SCHE, the ECTS, the ESG, etc.

Here as an interesting example of this construction, used in Norway. The creative aspect of this national approach (because one has to fall back on the EQF) is:

- Not level 5 but 6.1
- For the Bachelor this is 6.2
- It is a programme that fits the Bachelor - and is called a 'partial level' (which is not a formal concept, such as 'intermediate level', as proposed at the beginning of the Bologna process).
- This programme is offered in its own context by a University College, with the option to progress to the University's Bachelor's degree.

Here's the overview:



3 International context

As can be seen, the consequence is that 6.1 is actually the SCHE but falls under level 6 of the EQF. This could possibly lead to misunderstandings in international cooperation with institutions that have their SCHE at level 5. There will therefore have to be very good communication about how the system works.

A recent study also indicated that Norway does not have a SCHE in a formal sense, because this programme falls under level 6. This is also included as such in the tables that have been drawn up.

An option is to simply give 6.1 the status of level 5 again, with the distinction being 5.3.

There is no degree linked to level 6.1. It is a 'graduate', so in Norway it means Høgskolekandidat. It may be possible that in the long term it can still be called an 'Associate'.

We will have to keep a close eye on this in this series. International agreements can be made, but countries can deviate from them. They must take the consequences into account, although this means that not all interests of the stakeholders can be defended.

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

Ideas for international common names and terms

Subdivision within the HVPE Area and certificates

Chapter 4

1 Introduction

We are talking in our documents about creating a specific process for one of the sectors within the European Tertiary Education Area that builds on the VET sector. This is now called Higher VET, but in our opinion High Vocational-Professional Education (HVPE) is a better name for the qualifications that combine both approaches towards the labour market.

For the sake of clarity, it is of course the case that we are also in this context talking about an international approach when it comes to the name to be used for this type of providers. In a country one can easily take one's own names and concepts, in the national language.

In most situations HVPE is offered at the levels 5 and 6 of the EQF. But there may also be such institutions that provide qualifications at level 7 and possibly even also level 8 of the NQF (and the EQF). That is why we would like to indicate in advance that the following designations can be used for the type of diplomas at the three first levels:

- HVPE-A (level 5)
- HVPE-B (level 6)
- HVPE-C (level 7)

Later we can take a look at level 8 in this way, being a specific one.

In this phase we therefore do not assume the award of degrees and international names, as is the case in the European Higher Education Area with Bachelor, Master and Doctorate (PhD) and possibly soon also Associate for level 5 (still to be fixed). But in the coming years, having names could well be the case if the providers in the countries involved (think of the 47 countries that are also now participating in the EHEA) can make agreements about this with each other.

2 Full qualifications

From the start of the EHEA all countries have explicitly opted to work with so-called full degrees, i.e. having qualifications (cycles) based on standards for completing programs with full years and also semesters. An academic year is based on 60 credits, derived from the ECTS. However, it is up to a country itself to determine the study load for one credit, laid down in the law for national higher education, within certain limits for the minimum and maximum of it.

This means, for example, that the 'first cycle', the Bachelor, has a size of 180 to 240 credits. This bandwidth is related to the length of the previous (secondary) education, whether or not you have a binary system and other national agreements.

The collaboration between study programmes in different countries can be shaped on the basis of looking at parts of the study programs, often a semester or a year. But it can also apply to the entire programme, with double degrees and joint programs. The basic principle is that the same number of credits is linked to the joint part on both sides, but it is also possible to use only a set of 'learning outcomes'.

3 More detailed programmes - and micro-credentials

It was not usual to look for a more detailed collaboration on a structural basis, i.e. at the level of units, modules and so on. Of course that is always possible, but it makes it quite difficult to assess each other's offer, to determine the level and to arrive at conclusive agreements.

With the discussion about using the so-called micro-credentials (MCs), this quest is being revived with the EHEA, partly because the Bologna Process has actually come more or less to an 'open end' if it is about real major challenges. This cooperation is now mainly based on the pursuit of European University Alliances, with international cooperation, but then more on the basis of agreements within a network or platform, around common areas of focus. Also the idea of having 'European Degrees' has come up recently, supported by the European Commission.

With MCs, it is actually about making agreements about the use of units, modules and other parts of formal and accredited training, within the EHEA. This mainly concerns having 'Higher Education Certificates', also based on the use of credits. Most of the Higher Education Institutions and accreditation bodies actually want to subject them to the same frameworks that apply to the four cycles, in order to arrive at a new form of flexibilization. The question is whether this will lead to good and useful results in the short term.

But many governments seem to embrace this aspiration anyway. However, it is suspected that good results cannot be expected in the short term, because of all the interests involved, and also because of the involvement of the private education sector, within which these forms of flexibilization have been customary for years.

3.1 HVPE Area and partial qualifications

When it comes to starting a process that could lead to shaping a HVPE Area, we can make use of the experience gained with the EHEA, i.e. the Bologna Process, having from the start first of all the focus on full qualifications and the consequences of this approach.

The most important thing is that from the start we can also strive for a flexible implementation of the HVPE Area, i.e. not with all kinds of frameworks for a tightly completed system. Several formats can be used in this area, in order to be able to respond to multiple target groups.

Here a number of ideas are given for the process, not yet complete, but it can be seen as a starting point. And again we are looking at an international process, and then every country can decide about what is interesting in the national context.

3.2 Basis

The HVPE Area can rely on the following matters:

- The basis of the sector is that there is a framework for qualifications that can be linked to the NQF and therefore also to the EQF.
- The EQF levels concerned are 5, 6, 7 and 8. The highest entry level for qualifications offered within the European Tertiary Education Area is 4.
- As long as there are no international names available for these levels – leaving out level 8 at this moment - we can associate symbols with them:
A = 5
B = 6
C = 7.

3.3 Providers

In another document we indicated that in practice HVPE Institutes will mainly focus on levels 5 and 6. There are two options to make their position visible with its own entity within the national Tertiary Education Area (TEA):

- Operating independently, so with its own board for the HVPE Institute;
- Operating under the management of a consortium that includes both a HVPE Institute (5 and 6) and a VET College (till 4).

4 Partial qualifications within HVPE-A (level 5)

As stated, the EHEA only works with full qualifications (cycles), in order to achieve a comparable NHEA within a country. As already mentioned, there are now thoughts 'left and right' about formally using micro-credentials, especially when using them to issue certificates for parts of qualifications. Various countries have started working on it, partly depending on the space available, also formally and under the direction of the government. We will have to wait a while for further initiatives within the Bologna process because such innovation takes quite some time.

Because a HVPE Area can be built more or less from scratch, we can see how parts of formal training can be included. These are rewarded with a 'certificate', to have a clear international name. Our main concern is to initially have some kind of framework to map out the position of partial qualifications that lead to a certificate.

We will come back to what is now called a 'micro-credential' in a separate section.

Other documents in this series (3a and 3b) indicate that within a HVPE Area there is considerable differentiation with learning paths, using the levels for HVPE-A and HVPE-B. It was found that the

most flexibility can be achieved by using HVPE-A. As a person, you can opt for a direct learning path to HVPE-B. That's fine, but by first obtaining HVPE-A, a lot can still be done afterwards, with or without a view to acquiring a HVPE-B diploma.

For this reason and to keep things clear at the beginning of the process, we will now discuss the use of certificates for non-formal qualifications related to HVPE-A. This also means that we focus on the role in this and the possibilities for a HVPE Institute that provides formal qualifications and, in combination with that, can also focus on offering certificates.

5 Study load and credits and certificates and... having the VPC...

What does the above mean in general (so in principle for all levels) for our design and therefore the framework we have in mind?

- HVPE will emphatically not only and not exclusively concerned with formal qualifications that are based on providing them during several semesters and therefore also years (in full-time, for the average student and learner).
- So from the start, when working with this area, we assume that we will be able to find out how to embed other types of 'sub-qualifications' in it, where necessary and relevant within certain frameworks.
- To indicate the study load of a (full-time) qualification, we want to use our own unit. For higher education the 'EC' or 'Credit' can be used, the European Credit, based on the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System. The EC is also used for the SCHE. In another part of this series we suggested using for the HVPE Area: VPC (Vocational-Professional Credit). In order to be able to shape the link to higher education, we have proposed that a full-time year will have 60 VPC (with the study load of a VPC to be determined by a country itself, but with a minimum and maximum like it is the case for the EHEA).
- It should be stated emphatically that a subdivision of a qualification into units and then also having VPC to be linked to such an unit is not always a precondition, in view of being able to work with learning outcomes. In the EHEA that is the case, working with units and credits. It can be agreed for the HVPE Area that it is necessary to have also 'semesters', because of the international cooperation, and of course units and so on.

5.1 Different types of qualifications – formal and some other types being non-formal

There will be different types of qualifications, with their own status. Here an overview.

Important: This overview includes percentages to define certain qualifications. These percentages are of course not fixed. They serve as examples of how certificates and associated units of formal training can ensure a flexible approach. In the intended process for the HVPE Area, this can provide a framework for further discussions.

1. Formal qualifications – offered by VET Institutes

First of all there will be as basis for the 'framework' all those formal qualifications based on 30 VPC per semester and 60 VPC per year – leading to a diploma at level A, B and also C but together with D this level is not taken into account yet here – to be handled in a later stage – and limits are used for them in the international setting.

These qualifications will lead to a 'diploma'.

2. Non-formal qualifications – role of the HVPE Institute – just using HVPE-A

As previously indicated here, we also want to look at non-formal qualifications and the way in which a HVPE Institute can play a role in this.

It has already been mentioned that to keep things simple at this stage of arriving at a process, we are only talking about non-formal qualifications that belong to HVPE-A.

This means that we will also look at programmes that also reach level 5, but 'something different', so they are 'alternative learning paths'. But that doesn't always have to be the case, as we will show.

We are explicitly talking about non-formal qualifications based on the use of a number of VPC, but they will not have a programme based in all circumstances on having semesters of 30 VPC and thus not always using a full-time setting. They can also be seen as 'narrow' or 'small' qualifications.

We can distinguish two types for these non-formal qualifications, which is quite crucial *for* our process for the HVPE Area, to distinguish it from the approach within the EHEA with only the formal cycles and associated degrees.

- **Programme in the hands of HVPE-Institute itself - 'certificate awarding power'**

The non-formal programme is mainly based on units of a formal training offered by the HVPE Institute. These can be supplemented with other units that have been *specifically* designed and completed with the target groups of this qualification in mind, as a *form* of tailor-made solutions for this purpose.

This is a programme that has a study load that comprises at least 75% of the number of credits linked to HVPE-A in a country, but it can also be 100%. The condition is that the HVPE Institute provides learning outcomes that correspond to level 5.

Furthermore, a minimum of 60% and a maximum of 80% of the self-composed programme consists of a number of units of the formal training. This means that these are units that students can regularly choose within their formal education, at various stages.

With this requirement, the institution has a form of *'certificate awarding power'* to develop and offer these types of non-formal qualifications itself on the basis of formal training.

The Institute itself therefore links a number of non-formal units and therefore VPCs to the entire programme. They are units that are strongly focused on specific, narrow and/or business-oriented sub-functions. They can differ per design in order to serve various target groups, and can therefore also be implemented together with branches, industries, professional associations and other organizations within a professional field in terms of learning outcomes.

The number of VPCs of this type of non-formal qualifications is, as it were, linked to the number of VPCs associated with that formal training. It must be at least half of it and at most equal to the number of the formal training. The explicit condition is that the programme ends at level 5, based on the units of formal training that are introduced.

Anyone who completes the program with satisfactory results will receive a 'certificate'. The supplement lists the units, from the course or developed separately from it, as well as the formal course on which they are based and their level.

It depends on the legislation in a country whether these programs at a publicly funded VPE Institute are fully, partially or not funded at all. It is possible that there is a 'personal learning account' or other budgets.

- **Programme of the HVPE Institute, but linked to the NQF**

The programme is, as above, partly based on formal training, but is designed in such a way that less than 60% of it can be traced back to this. The program comprises a minimum of two units of a formal qualification, covering at least 25% of the relevant non-formal programme. As mentioned above, the programme is supplemented with other learning outcomes that can often be regarded as tailor-made for parts of the labor market.

The difference with the previous non-formal qualification is that the number of VPCs does not necessarily have to be equal to that of the formal training from which all kinds of units have been taken.

It is therefore really a non-formal qualification without it being clear what exactly the final level is and what the study load is in VPC.

In this case, the qualification must be presented to the National Coordination Point (NCP) and be classified there at a level of the NQF. Of course, the fact that the provider is a HVPE Institute plays a role in this, but by including 'new' units it cannot be left to the institute itself to determine the level for the entire programme.

In this case it concerns a private non-formal qualification. It depends on the legislation in the country whether the Institute can offer this itself or whether this must be done by a private partner institution with which the HVPE Institute collaborates by supplying all kinds of things.

Those who successfully complete this qualification will receive a 'certificate'. The units are mentioned in the accompanying supplement. It is stated which units belong to the relevant formal education, with the study load in VPCs.

Both types of qualifications therefore provide a 'certificate'.

3. Single units (one or more)

A HVPE Institute can then also offer one or more separate units of a formal programme at level 5, i.e. at HVPE-A, in a bundle. A number of VPCs are associated with this, based on the embedding in the formal programme.

This means that a unit or a bundle of units has demonstrable relevance for the labour market. Each of these units is a private non-formal qualification, if permitted, offered by the HVPE Institute or by a partner institution.

This qualification produces a 'unit certificate' per unit of the training. A bundle of units is also a bundle of unit certificates.

In the supplement, each unit states which formal training it concerns and its level, so in this case it is level 5 (HVPE-A).

We will not go into this specifically, but it will of course be possible to work with bundles of units from different HVPE courses. This may include specific 'crossovers'. In many positions in the field it can be seen that the activities also have similar forms and in such a case a combination can be effective.

4. Small qualifications

And then there will be other (smaller and tailor-made) non-formal qualifications that only work with trajectories without applying a study load based on the VPC. They can be offered by those institutions that are also involved in the first three categories of qualifications. It can also be stated what the value and its civil effect are when it comes to units of such a qualification or independent units of which it is possible to estimate the two levels between which the learning outcomes lie.

There is an overlap for this type of non-formal qualifications within the sector BPET. Later more about this.

This summary refers to a 'unit' as part of a formal program, with a certain number of VPCs as a study load. The programme is adjusted every year, with possible consequences for units: updated, disappeared, enlarged or reduced. This means that every supplement to a diploma, certificate or unit certificate must explicitly state which training course is referred to and the underlying program.

This approach relies on the status of the HVPE Institute and the quality of the formal training courses. If the training remains close, even in a form that is seen as non-formal, the institution itself can maintain control - i.e. with the 'certificate awarding power'. This also applies to non-formal qualifications, the level of which is formally determined by the NCP of the NQF, i.e. if the HVPE Area is between levels 4 and 5.

Then it is also good, to be on the safe side, to note that a HVPE Institute may itself add units to such a qualification, with formulated learning outcomes and the number of VPCs. That is also part of that 'power', based on the confidence that people have in the Institute.

5.2 Overview in a table

The amount of VPCs for the various options is translated schematically below and stated in the table.

Qualifications offered...		
Based on a formal qualification at level 5 (VPE-A)		
Status	Number or Range in VPCs	Comments
Formal	A: 90 – 120 <i>At level 5</i>	Amount of VPCs depending of the national system <i>Diploma</i>

Non-formal	At least 60% and at the most 80% of the units of a formal qualification plus other units, having 75 till 100% of the study load in VPCs compared to that qualification <i>At level 5</i>	Offered by the Institute as part of a 'certificate awarding power' – at the same level as the formal qualification <i>Certificate</i>
Non-formal	Less than 60% of the units of a formal qualification, with at least two units of that programme, having less than 75% of the study load in VPCs compared to that qualification <i>linked by the NCP to a level of the NQF (4 or 5)</i>	Private, stand-alone – maybe offered by a partner-institution <i>Certificate</i>
Non-formal	Stand-alone unit(s) – <i>part of a formal programme</i>	Private, stand-alone <i>Unit Certificate</i>
Non-formal	Part of the BPET sector	Whether or not these types of qualifications can be offered privately depends on the formal legislation in a country. <i>BP Certificate</i>

5.3 Providers

In principle, there are many providers of qualifications in a country, mainly non-formal. The vast majority operate in a private market, for individuals, companies, networks and the like, and people simply pay for it. But government-funded institutions can also provide non-formal qualifications under certain conditions, and privately if the legislation allows this. They can also collaborate with a private institution to give qualifications a form of labour market relevance. This means that it concerns a collaboration in which a HVPE Institute is a partner and has a clear substantive contribution.

5.3.1 Funded and private within the HVPE Area

In this document and the intended process we assume the situation in which HVPE Institutes are also involved in providing and offering certain types of non-formal qualifications, as classified and explained above (and which we will discuss further later).

This may concern HVPE Institutes that are funded by the government, completely private financed or a certain mix of these. In the latter case, there are national laws and regulations that determine which conditions are linked to that construction.

These are often not always clear and completely consistent, which can cause confusion. Within the HVPE Area, it would therefore be good to come up with transparent formats within the intended process from the start here at an international level so that in the event that HVPE Institutes collaborate internationally, funded by the government and/or privately designed, it is clear what is or is not possible with regard to the constructions.

In the further elaboration in this document, we assume a HVPE Institute without going further into the formal status.

5.4 Different lengths (study loads) for HVPE and formal qualifications

As indicated above, it is not the intention to make standard agreements for the HVPE Area for the length of a formal training course for the various levels. This did not happen in the EHEA for the four formal cycles either. This is partly the case in order to be able to take into account nationally the previous education and its length, the specific design of a course, the number of learning outcomes and competences associated with certain professions and functions and other circumstances that can lead to various amounts of study load.

However, for international comparability it is useful to work with bandwidths for formal qualifications at levels 5 and higher.

As previously suggested, within the framework of this document it is good to first limit ourselves to levels 5 (diploma A) and level 6 (diploma B). The other levels will be discussed later,

This is further elaborated in document 3b, with a proposal that will be one of the first points of discussion within the intended HVPE process. This concerns the bandwidths for diplomas A and B, from the start of the HVPE Area, but also the option to continue after A for B, with two scenarios described in document 3b.

Level	Bandwidth in VPC
A	90 – 120
B (after A)	Additional – in total to within the bandwidth 180 -240
B (direct)	180 – 240

6 Studying for a certificate / dropout

There may be all kinds of reasons to start learning, by following a (narrow or less extensive) programme that leads to a 'certificate'. It often involves acquiring a specific bundle of competences (and therefore learning outcomes), in order to be able to use them directly in a concrete situation, with a clear relevance to the labour market. This is often different from completing a full course of study for a formal diploma.

In addition, the option whereby someone takes a full qualification but stops studying at some point for one reason or another will soon have to be discussed. The institution can issue a 'study statement' stating which units of the course have been completed with a positive result. Such a statement can easily be used at a later stage to obtain exemptions, when a training course is started again.

It is often stated that it should always be possible to issue a certificate per educational unit, together with the study declaration. To us, this only seems sensible and justifiable if this educational unit in itself is relevant to the labour market. Or that a set of educational units as such has that relevance in a demonstrable way. This can then be stated in the study declaration as additional information. In other words, the status and value of a certificate can be protected in this way.

We did indicate in the previous paragraph that people only want to follow certain educational units without relevance, for a 'unit certificate'. We will come back to this in another document, together with a general discussion of micro-credentials.

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

Ideas for international common names and terms

The Level 5 Area

Chapter 5

1 Introduction

The series of documents concerns taking the initiative to set up an international process for the establishment of the High Vocational-Professional Education Area. To this end, we have introduced a division within the European Tertiary Education Area in terms of areas within which qualifications at levels 5 and above are offered. This includes two areas that focus on providing formal training:

- Higher Education – based on the European Higher Education Area
- High Vocational-Professional Education – within the High VPE Area, as we call it (and also known as Higher VET).

But we also draw specific attention to the so-called 'European Level 5 Area (EL5A)' that runs straight through these two areas, but also through the area for non-formal qualifications called Business-Personal Education and Training (and which is discussed in another document).

Here are the diagrams that belong to this, as also used in the other documents.

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

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

2 Level 5 Area

One of the reasons that we at CHAIN5 have taken this initiative is so that level 5 qualifications can be offered in all parts of tertiary education. This does not mean, however, that this is the case in every country and every part. It is up to the national government to make a decision about this and to adopt a vision in that regard.

This means that we will discuss the possibilities available here, so that we can look at it from an international perspective. Countries that seek cooperation with other countries for certain types of qualifications can conclude agreements on this basis. It thus promotes transparency around programmes, exchanges, platforms, networks and the like.

2.1 Level 5 embedded between 4 and 6, but sometimes 'different'

Our approach is based on the use of the EQF and therefore the NQFs that have now been included in all countries, also within the EHEA.

It is worth repeating here that although an NQF may be used in a country, it does not automatically mean that all types of qualifications within an education system are assigned a level number. A few examples of this:

1. In a country, the formal courses (cycles) in the National Higher Education Area are not assigned to NQF levels. Only the terms short cycle, first cycle, second cycle and third cycle are used.

2. In a country, the law can stipulate that non-formal qualifications can only be classified by the NCP up to and including level 6 of the EQF, to avoid confusion with formal education at levels 7 and 8.
3. In a country the situation may be that the NQF only applies to formal education. The non-formal qualifications have their own frameworks and associated instruments.

We can therefore take this into account, especially when it comes to the arguments that a government uses for not offering all types of qualifications the opportunity to be assigned a level via the NCP. There are of course many training programmes in every country that do not lend themselves to being linked to an NQF. They can be offered once, they are often tailored to specific companies, they are adjusted every year, and there can be several other reasons.

In addition, there is now discussion about the positioning of the so-called micro-credentials. Due to their design, they seem very difficult to link to a framework that mainly arises from the need to accommodate formal training. A solution for this still needs to be found. Of course, an NQF could then include not eight but - say - 20 levels, but then a country would be completely at odds with the EQF.

Countries are also struggling with 'informal qualifications' that are often seen as 'personal certificates' that record the competences someone has acquired in a certain environment. It is virtually impossible to link this to a clear level of the NQF. That is why we are also ignoring that category of qualifications here, in this stage.

3 Level 5 as bridge between secondary and tertiary education

In addition to the positioning between levels 4 and 6, it is certainly important to emphasize that a National Level 5 Area bridges the gap between secondary and tertiary education. Then the following classification, to keep it simple, concerns the formal qualifications:

Tertiary Education Area	
Higher Education	High Vocational-Professional Education
Secondary Education Area	
General Education	Vocational Education and Training

Then there must be learning paths that connect both areas. But all kinds of scenarios can occur nationally. We give a few, but note that there are also national regulations for the transition, with additional requirements, programs or other conditions. We are concerned here with the 'system'.

Available in a country for level 5	Situation concerning progression
There is the Short Cycle (within an unitary or binary system) No HVPE-A	In most cases, someone from secondary education can choose the Short Cycle or the First Cycle
No Short Cycle There is HVPE-A	From secondary education, someone can opt for the First Cycle or HVPE-A, with a possible subsequent switch to the First Cycle.
There is the Short Cycle (within an unitary or binary system) There is HVPE-A	Someone can choose from both options, partly in view of the subsequent continuations
No Short Cycle No HVPE-A (and no HVPE-B)	The only option in the formal context is the choice of the First Cycle

All mentioned scenarios will be included in the discussions that will undoubtedly arise when the process is started. The last two scenarios are the most interesting because they can benefit from the choices that have already been made nationally. The lack of formal training at level 5 in particular can be a reason to investigate, for example, whether non-formal training programs at level 5 or work-based learning using certificates are used in such a case.

As indicated in the table, whether a country has a binary NHEA also counts. In that case, the Short Cycle may, for example, be included in Professional Higher Education but not in Academic Higher Education. The continuation after the Short Cycle can then be completed in various ways within a national education system.

4 Instruments within a National Level 5 Area

As can be seen, a National Level 5 Area offers the opportunity to make the more obvious choices, such as from General Education to Higher Education. But the government can also choose to create more flexibility. But this requires a lot of cooperation from all sides. Higher education institutions, HVPE Institutes, VET Colleges and all educational associations need to agree on how to achieve all this. In a country with a binary system for higher education, this becomes a lot more difficult, especially if all kinds of learning paths can be identified within secondary education.

Now it is the case that within the Level 5 Area, if we look for its organization at an international level for the use of the necessary instruments that suit it, we have to deal with at least three situations:

1. The use of instruments within the EHEA that were developed within the Bologna Process and also apply to the Short Cycle must be respected.
2. Within the VET sector, agreements have also been made at international level for instruments that are comparable to those used within the EHEA. However, it should already be noted that they cannot be established internationally or simply have their own approach, which may or may not be 'compatible' with what is used in the EHEA. Sometimes the approach with an instrument resembles what is used in the EHEA, with all kinds of frameworks and regulations in a country, but on closer inspection it may be concluded that there are clear differences.
3. Within already existing HVPE areas (under different names), all kinds of countries have developed all kinds of their own instruments due to the lack of an international approach and the inability to use appropriate frameworks. If we continue our approach to a process, this will mean that if it is a success, a national government can simply leave everything the same or still make adjustments that are in line with international agreements.

Furthermore, some countries have very likely already made national agreements for the following pairs of sectors, if they exist in that country:

1. Flow from the VET sector to the NHEA
2. Progression from HVPE-A to the Bachelor of the NHEA
3. Flow within a binary system to the NHEA.

It means very clearly that choices have to be made when it comes to common instruments within the European Level 5 Area, given the feasibility of achieving widely accepted use of them.

5 Using NQF and non-formal qualifications

The whole thing we have in mind is partly based on the use of the EQF and therefore the NQFs. It should be noted that in principle a non-formal qualification can be registered with the NCP, after which the classification takes place on the basis of a set procedure - often on the basis of 'the best fit'. It will differ from country to country how the status of the provider is assessed, the way in which the quality of the program is assured, the approach to examinations and the study load, to name a number of things. But it seems that the level comes first and other matters are left to the institutions and national organizations involved that are expressly concerned with this.

In our process we first focus on formal educational qualifications. Including the Business-Personal Education and Training sector would therefore not be useful at this moment, given the strong diversity in the instruments used. We will include the BPET area at a later stage. In the meantime, it is up to those involved to what extent and to what extent they decide to join in.

6 Possible instruments

In a separate part of this series we will discuss the instruments that we will in any case include in our proposals. Here are the basic principles.

1. The types of instruments that are characteristic of the EHEA will in any case be included in the process, to see whether they are also used in other sectors and how this is done within their own context - looking at the number of countries that use this can be assessed, i.e. how relevant an instrument is within tertiary education as a whole.
2. Based on the instruments that are now internationally accepted within the VET sector, it is examined to what extent they are comparable with instruments in the EHEA and with HVPE areas in countries where they have already been developed.
3. The instruments developed by countries for their HVPE area are analyzed for their compatibility with the instruments of the EHEA and the VET areas.

All this will result in a list of instruments in a priority order. This means that in any case the most crucial instruments are chosen that are considered so important for all sectors that countries will choose their own design with a high degree of certainty.

In line with this, it will of course also be examined to what extent such instruments are suitable for the European Level 5 Area. It is possible that there are additional options, as a kind of 'bridge' between all kinds of scenarios. This also creates room for maneuver for the national approach..

7 And...

The concept of 'European Level 5 Area' is quite new when it comes to developments in international education. There are also few countries that have developed a policy for their own National Level 5 Area. However, after the decision in 2018 to consider the Short Cycle as an independent and recognized qualification within the EHEA, with exactly the same instruments, it can be seen that considerable efforts are being made in certain countries. In these dynamic times on the labour market, many national governments see that the need for shorter formal training courses is growing rapidly.

But previously, in countries with a unitary higher education system, the government had converted the need for highly labor market-oriented courses at level 5 and higher into making it possible to create forms of Higher VET. This process could be further supported by the growth in the use of the NQFs.

In short, the time is ripe, so to speak, for the next steps.

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

Ideas for international common names and terms

Use of credits in the tertiary education area, linked to sectors

Chapter 6

1 Introduction

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

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

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

Here are the corresponding diagrams.

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

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

In this document we discuss one of the important instruments that plays a role in all sectors, both nationally and internationally, namely the use of a unit for determining the study load and therefore for measuring the relative value of units on the basis of learning outcomes. This concerns a 'credit' or a 'study point' or a 'credit hour', or other names used for this.

The aim is to make a proposal regarding combining the systems for this within the areas. The starting point is to keep it simple, looking at the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) as it is used within the EHEA and therefore also in a NHEA, in case a country fully participates in the Bologna process.

2 Issue

Within an institution, in collaboration between institutions in their own country, but especially in collaboration between institutions in different countries, an important issue is the recognition of competences acquired earlier and elsewhere. These may be translated into learning outcomes for a specific unit. If a person has successfully completed this unit, it will formally count towards the exam for their own course. But there are several scenarios in which that unity plays a role.

We list a few of them here:

- Within an institution, the student transfers from one course to another during an academic year and wishes to obtain exemptions there on the basis of this unit;
- The same, but it applies to the transfer within your own country to another or equivalent course;
- The same, but this student completed that unit in an previous year, i.e. 'earlier', and wants to start a course for which that unit can provide exemptions;

- Within a partnership between institutions in a country, a course can be provided that has equal units at both institutions, as a 'joint programme' and then the question is how those units are handled;
- A student can take and pass a unit at an institution in another country within a partnership with his own institution, the question being how this will count within his or her own exam;
- The same, but there is no partnership between institutions and the student has completed units at a foreign institution.

It seems that an answer can always be given in an easy way, namely that the student in question submits proof of having passed the unit to the examination committee of the receiving programme. This person can make a judgment about what can count towards his or her own exam. This means a form of 'recognition of competencies acquired elsewhere'.

In formal partnerships between institutions, national and international, agreements can of course be made about the recognition and use of each other's units, based on a predetermined basic agreement. But these often apply for a certain period and only for the courses that fall under the collaboration.

A difficult situation can arise if the institutions belong to different education sectors and may not always reach the same level. It may also happen that an institution issues proof of having completed a unit with satisfactory results, but it is not clear what study load is associated with it. This is possible because in that country no formal study load is assigned to units or the system used for this differs clearly from that used in the student's own country.

Moreover, the certificate issued may be formulated in such a general manner that if there are no mutual agreements underlying it, it is virtually impossible for the receiving examination committee to do anything for the student.

The question is therefore how this can possibly be tackled if the aim is to set up the High VPE Area and also the European Level 5 Area.

3 Starting point for 'study load' of 'units'

With the documents in this series, we aim to start the discussion about the international transparency and unambiguousness of these two educational areas as much as possible. To achieve this, crucial aspects of a process must be identified as pillars of those areas. Instruments must be identified that can jointly maintain a well-functioning 'framework' for an educational area. National governments must also leave sufficient room for their own approach, in such a way that international partnerships can always be linked to this.

As we mentioned in the main document, number 1, the European Higher Education Area involves the following instruments within the framework of international agreements:

- a. Use of the term Cycle
- b. Use of the term Degree
- c. Dublin Descriptors for the cycles
- d. Use of the terms Professional and Academic (with a binary system)
- e. European Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance, internal and external
- f. Basing the study load on the use of ECTS, and therefore credits
- g. Use of the diploma supplement, with a specific format.

Because all this already exists and has been further developed over the years, we in principle also use these instruments as the basis for a comparable framework for both educational areas. In this document we will look at what can result if we assume the ECTS with European Credits (EC) linked to it as a term for determining the study load of a course, an academic year and subsequently the units that are taken within it.

Moreover, we assume units that do not cross the boundaries between academic study years, to prevent complicated constructions from arising within international cooperation that can make everything confusing and unnecessary non-transparent.

4 The ECTS is connected to international higher education

We must make a clear agreement when it comes to the deployment and use of the ECTS. The system was developed for the international higher education area and is therefore firmly linked to

institutions in countries where the NHEA is based on the EHEA. Then we are talking about the Universities and the Universities of Professional Education and Research (Universities of Applied Sciences), as well as higher education institutes that only offer in a formal context the Short Cycle, such as: Associate College, Business Academy and Higher Professional College.

This means that the ECTS as such cannot simply be used outside higher education, to avoid confusion, as the system as such is explicitly linked to all those other instruments within the EHEA. It would also mean that if adjustments are made within the ECTS in the Bologna process, they should immediately lead to adjustments elsewhere in other sectors and areas. It could also be the other way around, but the Bologna Process is simply autonomous internationally and has no formal connections with what is happening in the other sectors.

It should be noted that the last edition of the ECTS Users' Guide dates from 2015. There have therefore been no recent relevant developments that have led to an update of the system, although there is sufficient reason to do so, with all the adjustments in the other instruments and their use in all countries. But this situation has to be accepted – and there are now plans for such an update.

What is the ECTS

There can be a long review of what the ECTS entails. But we'll keep it as simple as possible here to avoid having to discuss all the details for a long time. The most important things:

- The ECTS concerns the use of 'ECTS credits', which can be abbreviated to 'credits' and then in practice to ECs. 'ECTS credit' is consistently used in the User's Guide.
- The academic year within the EHEA is set up in such a way for a full-time student that it normally has a study load of 1500 to 1800 clock hours. But that is not an obligation. A country may deviate from this.
- Units of learning outcomes are used.
- The units within an academic year have a combined study load of 60 EC.
- The diploma supplement lists the units completed and the EC per unit.
- The first three cycles (short, first, second) all have a lower and upper limit for the study load. It is up to a country to fit all this into its own system. The fourth cycle (PhD) does not have a fixed amount of ECs in the EHEA context.

The EC is therefore linked to units, within a program that has been tested against the Dublin Descriptors (or equivalent descriptors), the European Standards and Guidelines, the level and which as such results in a degree.

Problems in implementation and application

The ECTS is intended to enable international cooperation through the mutual deployment of units within the courses. But that is actually only what is concretely possible, i.e. 60 EC per academic year. There is quite a bit of freedom in national usage, with certain consequences:

- Number of ECTS for a cycle in a country, partly depending on the previous education and the orientation of the program;
- Study load per year in a country, even outside the borders of 1500 and 1800;
- The number of EC linked to a specific unit, to be determined by each institution itself, with its own standards and criteria, also to fit into an academic year;
- This means that the actual study load of a specific unit may differ per institution and per country - unless it has been agreed within a national or international partnership to equalize that study load, including in the case of 'joint programmes'.

Based on this, in practice there is no automatic way to recognize each other's units and take over the ECs. It is always a matter of an assessment by the examination committee of the learning outcomes and the awarding of the number of ECTS within your own study programme. This is completely logical to prevent, for example, a unit at institution A comprising 5 EC and at institution B a number of 8 EC, so that when transferring from A to B the student receives, as it were, 3 EC 'for free'.

The most important thing about the ECTS can be expressed as follows:

- The institutions involved are part of an NHEA based on the EHEA;
- They use a number of ECTS to determine the study load per year and for specific units;
- It is clear to which cycle the unit belongs and in which phase;

- It means that on this basis, the holder of proof that a specific unit has been completed with a satisfactory result will have access to a process whereby the examination board (in a formal sense, even if agreements have been made) determines how this unit counts towards the exam of the other study programme.

So it creates mutual trust, as it were. But again, there is no general automaticity of taking over the number of ECs linked to a unit.

The 'value over time' of a unit must also be taken into account. If a unit is immediately transferred elsewhere, that trust will come into play or it will be possible to fall back on the cooperation agreement that institutions have concluded, if applicable. But the longer a person waits before wanting to use the unit, the sooner the examination board will actually initiate an RPL (recognition of prior learning) procedure. It may be that at a certain point a unit no longer has any value because the learning outcomes are outdated.

In short, the desire to be able to recognize each other's EC within the EHEA under all circumstances is a utopia. It has, however, led to more respect for each other's education.

From outside the EHEA to an institution of higher education

No agreement has been made within the EHEA about dealing with 'credits' that are used outside higher education, i.e. the Bologna process. It was and is difficult to say anything about this in parallel with the EHEA, especially if completely different criteria were used. See further below at ECVET.

In a parallel education sector, it is also best to state, on one's own national initiative, within one's own regulations, that 'credits' are used and that they also fall under the ECTS. But that does require clarification, for example about the relationship with the national higher education area. For example, it is certainly possible nationally to choose a certain comparable approach, for example having qualifications that fall under Higher VET, i.e. HVPE. But by extension, all other EHEA instruments must also be used for that sector, such as descriptors, quality assurance and the like. Moreover, a government can decide to use the national organizations that also works for the NHEA.

The problem is then clear: what to do when the concrete situation is such that a distinction can no longer be made between the two sectors, but that they both fall under the national tertiary education area. It may then be decided at a certain point to include the relevant institutions in the NHEA, thus ensuring some form of merger. This means that a 'transfer' will take place and that is a quite drastic organization.

But if this is not done, the country may run into problems internationally. In other countries a different approach can also be chosen, with different names for those parallel sectors and also with their own use of a unit for the study load. One can also use the concept of 'credit', but on closer inspection it concerns a different type of unit.

It means that without having international agreements for sectors in addition to the EHEA, each country can arrange everything itself and can also use similar terms, but then there is no possibility to give each other that necessary trust in all circumstances.

Another situation is, for example, that a country can state that in such a parallel sector, in addition to the NHEA, only units of learning outcomes are used, without formally linking a measure of the study load. In such a case one is much further away from home, so to speak.

In short, in all these unclear cases, the receiving institution can only ensure a procedure in which the learning outcomes acquired elsewhere are examined in detail and how they fit into their own training. But don't worry, there are still scenarios that can work.

5 ECVET

Yet there was (is) another system within the international context, namely ECVET, the 'European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training'. In terms of the name, there was therefore a very clear similarity with the ECTS.

The ECVET system was developed by Cedefop on a project basis about ten years ago at the request of the European Commission, and is partly linked to, for example, the EQF and other frameworks. But with the exception of a few countries, it has hardly been used for the VET sector (levels up to and including 4), due to the fact that each country has its own unique approach. It was only very useful for internships lasting a semester, as 'half the study load of a year'.

In 2019, after various discussions, the European Commission pulled the plug out of the entire system, with the recommendation in 2020 to abandon this system. Reference is made to other initiatives considered more important for the VET sector, up to and including level 4 of the EQF.

ECVET was not originally intended for levels 5 and higher. Countries that have put a lot of effort into offering this have made use of the experiences, such as Malta and Estonia. But that approach was not strong enough to maintain ECVET at those levels.

It is of course obvious that in a coming process around the VPE sector and for the EL5A, the experiences with the ECVET can be drawn upon.

6 BPET (non-formal)

We will leave the BPET sector out of this for the moment. Other systems can be devised for the non-formal qualifications linked to an NQF, but with similarities with what we aim to achieve here. In line with this, we will return to this issue with 'micro-credentials'.

7 How to go on...

The aim is to explicitly look for a credit system for the HVPE sector, in any case aimed at the international context, outlined in a number of steps. We can then look at what is possible within that system for qualifications at level 5. They form the bridge between 4 and 6, as well as between secondary and tertiary education, and this means that we must look at how this all relates to what happens at level 4 – or not.

Approach and research

Because we are looking for a HVPE credit system that fits in as closely as possible with the ECTS and can count on the broadest possible support, the first phase of the approach could include the following steps:

- Inventory which countries have a formal sector in addition to their NHEA
- Find out which countries have introduced a formal system for that sector
- Make an analysis of these systems based on the criteria for the ECTS
- Inventory of the national organizations involved in the national system.

In parallel, consultations can be planned with:

- European Commission, looking back at ECVET and discussing current plans
- Committees involved in ECVET
- Desk research
- Cedefop on the experiences gained
- European associations for VET
- Possible other organizations that have an interest in this subject.

This can also be used for:

- Inventory among other countries regarding interest in joining in the future
- Check whether there are budgets for the approach or whether projects can be set up
- Consultation with the Bologna Follow-Up Group about further developments within the EHEA and the possibilities for collaboration.

In addition, several actions are certainly possible, but we will include them in an action plan in the coming year. The aim is also to set up a small steering group to draw up this action plan and supervise its dissemination.

At this stage, let us choose an abbreviation for the intended VP Credit Transfer and Accumulation System, i.e. VPCS for short. Of course, another – shorter - abbreviation may also be introduced as the process is underway.

8 Collaboration around VPCS and ECTS

As indicated, it is very important to connect as closely as possible to the ECTS when developing the VPCS. But it must also be taken into account that there are institutions in the HVPE sector that also offer qualifications up to and including level 4, thus connecting two sectors. ECVET as such failed because – as mentioned – almost all countries had no interest in such a system and therefore blocked its further introduction.

Within the VET system it is never possible to determine exactly how much time someone needs to master certain learning outcomes. Sometimes it is more than expected and sometimes less.

Creating 'standardized' units was therefore seen as creating barriers in the pursuit of flexibility. Certain competences can also appear in multiple parts of a qualification, so that one unit can also cover a specific part of the other unit. One must also be able to accelerate, if that is useful.

A system will therefore have to be created that has its own character within the HVPE area, but which also fits in on important points with what is seen as important within a NHEA. This requires an attitude that is open to all comments from different quarters, possibly with some clear principles.

9 High VPE Area and a unit for study load

As such, the concept of 'credit' has acquired a very strong place in education at levels 5 and higher. This actually means that when using it, one immediately thinks of its use within 'higher education' and therefore of the ECTS. So that is the power of having an international understanding...

However, it is true that the 2015 ECTS guide always refers to 'ECTS credit', so it is stated in full. Countries then turn it into 'credit', to keep it simple. In addition, there are also institutions that use the term 'ECTS' (i.e. 'a unit with 5 ECTS'), but that is very special because this is the system itself and not a unit for the study load (and it is strange to speaking of '5 systems'). It is then absolutely advisable to use EC as the abbreviation, in all circumstances.

All this means that if a specific unit for the study load is also used within the HVPE sector, confusion must be prevented on all kinds of international fronts. This does not rule out doing something with the concept of 'credit', as can be seen in various parts of the world. The point is that it is clear in which context this concept is used.

Because we propose, and also want to communicate this to the BFUG of the Bologna Process, that 'EC' is consistently used as a concept in the EHEA, something else must be devised for the VPCS as a concept for the unit.

The proposal is to use 'VPC' for this, i.e. the '*Vocational-Professional Credit*'.

We do not use the E for European because it is expected that this term can and will also be used in other countries, in the international context. 47 countries are members of the EHEA, so much more than we know for the EU. It can therefore be marketed in a more general manner, the VPC.

10 European Level 5 Area also

A process will therefore be initiated that focuses on setting up and shaping the HVPE sector, including the use of an international system for credits, the VPC. In addition, we want to see how a process can be started for the European Level 5 Area. The first step towards this is also planned for the coming year.

11 Role of the EQF

A specific role in all of this is reserved for the use of the EQF and therefore also the NQFs. In 2023 the last countries formally joined the EQF with their NQF so that in principle all qualifications can be compared in terms of level. The learning outcomes of a qualification are also taken into account. What is emphatically not (always) relevant to the EQF, although opinions may differ based on certain sources, are the following aspects:

- Scope of a qualification, measured in clock hours, i.e. for the study load;
- The type of provider, whether or not funded and whether or not also a provider of formal qualifications;
- The accreditation and quality assurance of the qualification, regardless of the status of the provider;
- Whether or not to offer a qualification supplement;
- The name of the qualification;
- The right to progress to other qualifications.

In addition, the EHEA does not include a formal and agreed condition that the four cycles belong to levels 5 to 8 of the EQF. It is up to a country itself to determine this, by using the descriptors of the NQF (also more or less an own version of the EQF descriptors) declared compatible with the Dublin Descriptors, if that is possible. But even then, a country may legally stipulate that the HEIs are not obliged to include the levels in the diploma supplement. This is of course recommended.

This situation must therefore be taken into account in the process, also because there are often separate regulations in a country for the progression from a parallel sector (such as Higher VET and our HVPE) to the learning paths in the NHEA.

12 Initial thoughts VPCS with features

Here are some suggestions when it comes to the features of the VPCS. These are features that everyone actually expects and that it will not be surprising if they are actually found in the system.

- A full-time study year has 60 VPC.
- Units are based on learning outcomes.
- The study load of an academic year in a country within the national context is equal to the number of clock hours used within the NHEA for each of the cycles.
- The full-time qualifications are linked to the NQF.
- Units are expressed in whole numbers of VPC.

13 Tertiary Credits?

Finally, one more thought that can be included in the discussions. As indicated, the intention is that the credit system for the HVPE Area also provides a connection between the VET sector (where Colleges can also offer level 5 and higher under the banner of HVPE) and the HE sector. But there is also an option in which only the HVPE Area and the HE Area are taken into account, so that the characteristics of the underlying credit systems are simply the same. The difference is that they are used for different areas.

A very creative idea is to tie in with the fact that both sectors fall under the Tertiary Education Area. Then one could also talk about positioning the VPC and the EC within a system for Tertiary Credits, or TC. The government can use this to show that 'the outside world' knows that there is no difference between the status of the VPC and the EC.

But hey, it's an idea that can be kept in mind. So first start the process and then see what is useful to take with you at a certain point.

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

Ideas for international common names and terms

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.

Chapter 7

1 Introduction

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

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

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

Here are the corresponding diagrams.

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

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

In this document we want to look at the instruments that have been developed within the EHEA to enable Higher Education Institutions to communicate well with each other internationally in all forms of collaboration, projects, platforms and other types of networks. It concerns the Bologna Process, which was aimed at Europe, but 47 countries are already participating. Then we could also speak of a Worldwide Higher Education Area, although that is currently too ambitious. There are countries that want to use certain instruments, but then it turns out that the entire system would then have to be overhauled.

So we want to advocate for a process to have a HVPE Area, designed parallel to the Higher Education Area. The aim will be to create a design that can be used in Europe and other countries within the Bologna Process. But that does not affect the fact that we can watch and participate elsewhere in the world at the same time.

2 Use of instruments and common agreements

Here the instruments for the HVPE Area that must be included in the process are listed. A brief explanation is given for each instrument, possibly as a basis for further discussions.

We always provide the instrument as used for the EHEA, and then our comments.

2.1 Use of the term Cycle

At the start of the Bologna Process, a completely individual designation of the distinguishable classification of the offer was chosen. This was done by speaking of a 'cycle'. That in itself sounds logical because a bandwidth has been agreed for a cycle, for the programme that is being completed. This created three cycles: the first cycle, the second cycle and the third cycle. They then looked at available English names: Bachelor, Master and PhD (Doctoral).

After a few years, it caused a problem for qualifications with a study load between 90 and 120 EC. That's why it became the 'Short Cycle', apparently with the First Cycle considered to be 'long'. To this day, even after the formal embedding of the SCHE in the EHEA, this causes problems when it comes to positioning. There is also no international common name yet, such as Associate.

It is proposed for the HVPE Area to join the EQF. This means that we do not talk about 'cycle', but 'level'.

2.2 Use of the term Degree

Using the concept of a Degree also seems to us to be firmly linked to higher education. Someone who completes a cycle receives a diploma and also a 'degree'. Internationally, that means Bachelor, Master and PhD – and Associate as a proposal.

In addition, a country may decide to give someone the opportunity to use a title. For example, it is common for the PhD to lead to the use of the title Doctor, i.e. Dr.

The proposal is not to work with Degrees within the HVPE Area, as in the EHEA. The idea is to use the level of the NQF or a concept that fits in indicating a sequence for levels 5 to 8 of the EQF.

It is also clear that certain countries value linking a 'title' to a higher level. An example is the use of 'Meister' in German-speaking countries for level 5. It is therefore up to the country itself to use its own national name.

The proposal is to use level indications, with the symbols A, B, C and D. This has been further elaborated in another document. It is possible that international titles or names could be devised in the course of the process, but it is not yet one of the priorities.

2.3 Dublin Descriptors for the cycles

The Dublin Descriptors have been developed for the four cycles in the EHEA. But in almost all countries they have been declared compatible with the EQF descriptors, for levels 5 to 8. This means that the National Coordination Points can use them to scale the HVPE qualifications. The national NQF descriptors may have a more adapted and detailed design, but this does not alter the fact that they can be used for the HVPE Area.

The proposal is therefore to use the EQF descriptors for the HVPE Area. Each country then has its own translation to the NQF.

2.4 Use of the terms Professional and Academic (with a binary system)

In higher education, a country can have a unitary or a binary system. This generally means that in the latter case there are two types of providers, based on their orientation: Academic or Professional. However, it does not mean that there are only two types of institutes, for example after the introduction of the Short Cycle. In addition to the University and the University of Applied Sciences (and with similar names), countries can opt for an institution that only offers level 5, with a possible top-up for level 6 for certain types of courses. This can be a Business College, a Business Academy or an Associate College. But then they also fall under the concept of 'Professional', i.e. with the label 'Professional Higher Education'.

The proposal is not to make a subdivision for the HVPE Area when it comes to a form of orientation.

2.5 European Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance, internal and external

This will be one of the most challenging instruments, considering which system can be used for the quality assurance of a training course, the provider and all kinds of designs for the HVPE Area. This also includes the 'accreditation' of a qualification, within the EHEA, carried out by a National Accreditation Body. Two important things will play a role in this:

- The EQAVET system exists for the VET sector. There will already be countries that have compared the ESG of the EHEA with what is used in the EQAVET approach. We will definitely include the results in the process.
- There are already countries where the accreditation and quality assurance for qualifications falling under the HVPE Area is in the hands of the National Accreditation Body for the NHEA. We also want to make use of that.

The proposal is to conduct research into the possibilities involved in both matters before developing a system for the HVPE Area. There may be a combination of both systems. The fact that a HVPE Institute is independent or falls under the same board as the VET College may also play a role.

2.6 Basing the study load on the use of ECTS, and therefore credits

A separate document has been drawn up for this purpose, with a number of considerations.

The proposal is to develop an own 'credit system', but to rely heavily on the ECTS. This means that a 'VPC' can be used (a Vocational-Professional Credit).

2.7 Use of the diploma supplement, with a specific format

In the EHEA, a supplement is added to each diploma. A specific format has been developed for this.

The proposal is to develop a similar supplement for the HVPE qualifications.

3 So...

The process concerns the design of the HVPE Area, as an independent sector within the Tertiary Education Area. In order to emphasize and preserve its individuality, there must be instruments to ensure this. But it is also clear that qualifications within the HVPE Area connect to the VET sector and can also serve as a link for taking a course in an NHEA. Moreover, someone from the NHEA can also transfer to the National HVPE Area, as is now clearly visible when it comes to preparation for the labour market.

In short, there is an initial list of tools to get you started. In a certain way it provides guidance for the intended process. But as we work along we can also see how the individuality of the HVPE Area requires specific instruments. That will have to become clear.

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

Ideas for international common names and terms

Use of micro-credentials in the EL5A

Chapter 8

1 Introduction

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

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

Here are the corresponding diagrams.

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

2 Micro-credentials

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

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

Uncertainty and approach to higher education

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

But institutions also see it as an option to develop additional units that form a variant of the regular training units and can therefore be offered on a tailor-made basis. This allows, for example, publicly

funded institutions to also undertake private activities, a situation that is seen in many countries as a supplement to current options.

Idea behind a MC

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

MC and HVPE Area

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Comments...

We would like to make the following comments:

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

leading. This means that, as it were, each 'unit certificate' is unique, linked to the institution that provides this proof. The receiving training provider will therefore always have to analyze its value, leading to possible exemptions.

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

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

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

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

4 At the end...

There is considerable pressure on national education systems to become more flexible. But this means that a structure that has often been used as such for decades and within which publicly funded and private providers of formal qualifications function, must be adapted. This can lead to additions but also to shifts, new forms of education and the redesign of learning paths. The options for institutions can also be expanded, but sometimes also limited. This means that a new policy affects the interests of existing and newly established institutions.

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

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

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...

Chapter 9

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	HE	PHE	AHE	Third Second First Short
7						
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.

CONTENT

The structure of a
'High Vocational-Professional Education (HVPE) Area'
and
a 'European Level 5 (EL5) Area'
&
Ideas for international common names and terms
in the Tertiary Education Area
Incl. a proposal for having a process for those developments

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