

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

Part 2
January 2025

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 areas and sectors, with the associated qualifications.

Pre-ambule

This document concerns proposals relating to the international Tertiary Education Area, based on all types of formal and non-formal qualifications at levels 5 to 8 of the EQF. This TEA is divided into a number of sectors. These can be clearly defined on the basis of a number of criteria and with the use of instruments that explicitly determine such a sector.

This is an approach that applies to the international classification of the TEA and the sectors indicated therein. In addition, English names are given that are proposed to be used in the international context. These can be used in international cooperation and agreements based on this between countries, institutions and organizations, as the associated sectors have their own defined characteristics.

Every country that wants to participate in this process in one way or another has complete freedom to design its own 'National Tertiary Education Area', with a self-chosen subdivision and appropriate criteria. Choices are made regarding having names for all kinds of concepts, often in the national language. If the government then uses English translations within one's own official communication about the national system, it can also choose one's own approach. There is no international body that can prescribe and enforce this.

We hope that in the coming years more and more countries will base themselves on our proposal and work with it. This can be compared to the Bologna Process that led to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Voluntary agreements have been established that people can adhere to in all kinds of partnerships. It is true that there are still countries that design certain deviating constructions, for all kinds of reasons. Countries can address each other within the EHEA about these matters, but never force each other to make the right adjustments. This can lead to misunderstandings and less transparent constructions and that is why we hope that our initiative will also lead to a form of harmonization for every National HEA.

In short, we work with international proposals and every country may and may participate in the process that we intend to initiate.

1 TEA (Tertiary Education Area)

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

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

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 (High VPE), 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.

1.1 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 at 2.3).

1.2 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:

1. 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'.
2. If it turns out that a particular national area can be found in two areas of this international scheme, which can be substantiated in a clearly substantive manner, then both will be noted.
3. If the area can be clearly positioned, the national providers of the qualifications within the associated international area (sector) will be considered for the research as institutions with the international name that we use in the context of our proposals.
4. If it turns out that certain national providers can be found in two international areas, 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.
5. The results of this research will be included in a report per country, together with an analysis of the entire situation.
6. 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.
7. On this basis, the proposed process will be initiated to develop the HVPE Area as such at an international level.
8. 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.

2 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.

2.1 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:

1. An institution for formal education, such as for High VPE, 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.
2. A VET College is involved in formal education up to level 4 and then also offers High VPE 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.

2.2 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.

2.3 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

3 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 (High VPE as we call it), we are now confronted with certain consequences.

3.1 General education

Every country has a area 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.

3.2 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, 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. High VPE 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 (or High VPE).

4 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.

4.1 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.

4.2 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 target 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.

4.3 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:

1. Having a job at a company and combining this during the study (status: apprenticeship)
2. Being a student and doing part-time 'work' at a company (status: internship)
3. 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.

5 Aspects to include

As already indicated, what is proposed here 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.

5.1 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.

5.2 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 programs 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.

5.3 Formal arrangements

There are countries where the government determines within the system which cooperation structures can lead to continuous learning paths. The sectors and areas 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 competences and the associated study load. This is especially important when it comes to different areas. It is a lot easier to arrange this within the same area, and therefore also within institutions.

There are also examples of countries where the sectors and areas 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.

6 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 areas, 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 areas 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 topics within this series are:

1. Classification of tertiary education, the positioning of the HVPEA and the use of international common names
2. A closer look at the division of tertiary education
3.
 - a Levels within the HVPEA
 - b Learning paths within the HVPEA
 - c Progression from 5 (HVPE - SCHE) to 6 (First Cycle)
 - d Top-up programmes at level 5
4. Subdivision within the VPEA and certificates
5. The positioning of the L5A
6. Use of credits in tertiary education, linked to sectors
7. Harmonization of instruments for the EHEA and the HVPEA – for example looking at the European Standards and Guidelines, the Dublin Descriptors and the ECTS for the EHEA, EQAVET, EQF-LLL descriptors and ECVET respectively.
8. Use of micro-credentials in the EL5A
9. Why having the EHEA and the HVPEA next to each other...