

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.

Part 7
January 2025

Preamble

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

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

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

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

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

1 Introduction

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.

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 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
 - e Specific approach for SCHE
4. Subdivision within the HVPEA and certificates
5. The positioning of the L5A
6. Use of credits in tertiary education, linked to sectors
7. Harmonization of instruments for the EHEA and the HVPEA – for example looking at the European Standards and Guidelines, the Dublin Descriptors and the ECTS for the EHEA, EQAVET, EQF-LLL descriptors and ECVET respectively.
8. Use of micro-credentials in the EL5A
9. Why having the EHEA and the HVPEA next to each other...