

Background paper to the working group on implementation

Meeting Tbilisi 3 June 2016

Short cycle (higher) education in the EHEA

Questions to be treated/discussed in the Tbilisi meeting:

- Should we (if yes, how should we) modify the framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area in order to fulfil the commitment from the Yerevan Communiqué? Do we need to make proper adjustments to the Dublin descriptors (which refer to short cycle within the first cycle)?
- What should be the basic characteristics of the short cycle programme so they can be treated by all EHEA members as a HE qualifications?
- How short cycle qualifications should be treated in EHEA countries which do not comprise such qualifications (e.g. in terms of holders' progression)?

Questions to be treated in seminars or PLA (to be discussed in the Tbilisi meeting):

- What factors are facilitating c.q; hindering recognition and articulation/permeability national and cross-border? (on the basis of examples of good practices, stories, facts, ..)
- What are the rationales/driving factors for facilitating articulation?

From the implementation report:

Short cycle programmes have been the subject of discussion since the beginning of the Bologna Process. While a group of countries had neither short cycle programmes nor any plans to introduce them, other countries with such programmes were looking to integrate them in the Bologna three cycle system. The compromise wording accepted in the Bologna Process Ministerial Conference in 2005 in Bergen formulated the concept of "short cycle within the first cycle". However this has not solved all the issues. Hence several ministerial communiqués have since addressed short cycle study programmes with a view to improving their transparency and comparability. The 2014 BFUG survey attempted to clarify several issues related to short cycle studies. The number of educational systems having short cycle programmes has grown from 14 in 2005 to 26 in 2014. As illustrated (in Figure 2.9), short cycle programmes are most commonly considered to belong to higher education but in some countries they are attributed to post-secondary Vocational Education and Training (VET). The countries that do not have short cycle provision can also be divided in terms of their attitude to such programmes.

The diversity of the short cycle can also be seen from the names attributed to short-cycle qualifications, including: *Higher Education Certificate, Undergraduate certificate, Higher Technician, Professional diploma, Advanced Professional Diploma, Interim Qualification, Technological Diploma, Higher Education Diploma, Diploma of Higher Education, Undergraduate diploma, University diploma, Associate degree, Degree, Foundation Degree, First Level Professional Higher Education Diploma, Sub-Bachelor, Professional Bachelor* (6). In addition, some countries including France, Luxembourg, Malta, Spain and the United Kingdom have several short-cycle qualifications at different levels.

Furthermore, while the majority of programmes lead to professional qualifications, some are considered as academic qualifications.

Figure 2.10 shows a wide range of practices regarding the credit awarded to short-cycle graduates when continuing to study in a first-cycle programme. In eight systems, full credit may be awarded, although in Ireland and the United Kingdom (England, Wales and Northern Ireland) this depends on an agreement between the institutions where the two programmes (short-cycle and first cycle) are taught. In Bulgaria, full credit is granted only for short-cycle graduates continuing in professional first cycle programmes. Some countries also mention shorter programmes which either prepare for certain professions or are intermediate qualifications in programmes leading to a first-cycle degree. The length of such programmes can vary between 60 ECTS (one year) to 180 ECTS (three years). The most common length of short-cycle programmes seems to be 120 ECTS credits (two years), as mentioned by Andorra, Belgium (French Community), Croatia, Denmark, Norway and Sweden.

In the countries where there are several options, the number of credits recognised may vary substantially. Indeed in three countries this varies between full and zero credit. In Georgia, although several options exist in theory, there have been no cases of recognition of short cycle qualifications for the purpose of continuing to study in a first cycle programme.

CEDEFOP working paper ‘qualifications at level 5: progressing in a career or to higher education:

This study examines the qualifications at level 5 of the EQF. The report shows the huge diversity of the short cycle (higher) education provision in the 15 countries covered in the study. The selected countries had completed the referencing process of their national QF to the EQF by June 2012.

1. Level 5 qualifications operate across the different subsystems as they have been identified in the report: general education, Vocational Education and Training and higher education. In some countries level 5 qualifications are only linked to VET (Higher Vocational and Education Training), in others only to higher education and in others to both HVET and HE. In one country (UK) the level 5 qualifications are linked to the three subsystems: general education, HVET and HE . In 2 countries level 5 qualifications are qualifications from outside formal education and training. In BE FL we have both: level 5 qualifications from inside formal education (the so called educational qualifications) and level 5 qualifications from outside formal education (the so called vocational qualifications).
2. What are/were the policy drivers to establish level 5 qualifications/SCHE:
 - a. To bring education and the world of work closer together
 - b. To meet the skills deficit at intermediate level due to the economical, technological or societal developments
 - c. To contribute to meet the participation target for the 18-30 population
 - d. To offer opportunities for those who want to enter HE later in life

- e. To give a stimulus to LLL: upskilling and reskilling workforce
3. The profile of level 5 qualifications: most level 5 qualifications are clearly linked to occupations or professions
 - a. Level 5 qualifications are only considered as an intermediate step towards a (mostly professionally oriented) bachelor degree;
 - b. Level 5 qualifications are independent qualifications with primarily a labour market relevance
 - c. Level 5 qualifications are independent qualifications but provide clearly articulated entry and progression opportunities into a (professionally oriented) bachelor programme (the focus of the level 5 provision is mainly on transition and a stepping stone to HE for non-traditional students)
 - d. Level 5 qualifications have a double function: progressing in professional career and progressing in higher education
 4. Different types of institutions have been authorized to award level 5 qualifications:
 - a. Higher education institutions
 - b. Centres for adult education
 - c. A VET college
 - d. A college for further education
 - e. Schools for post-secondary vocational education
 - f. Other providers, including private providers
 - g. Mixt
 5. Level 5 qualifications are available for a broad range of study areas and study fields reflecting the major economic sectors:
 - a. Information technology
 - b. Media
 - c. Automatization
 - d. New technologies
 - e. Child care and education
 - f. Health care
 - g. Tourism and hospitality
 - h. Social work
 - i. Business (retail)
 - j. Logistics
 - k. ...
 6. The origin of level 5 qualifications:
 - a. It is a new qualification introduced in the wake of the introduction of the NQF
 - b. An adaptation/redesign of existing sub-degree programme or existing VET programmes
 - c. Just re-naming of existing programmes
 7. The length of the study programmes:
 - a. 90 – 120 -150 ECTS
 - b.
 8. The name of the degree or qualification or certificate awarded: the CEDEFOP report has identified 31 qualifications types:
 - a. Associate degree
 - b. Vocational qualification/degree
 - c. Occupational qualification
 - d. Advanced certificate
 - e. Higher certificate;
 - f. Brevet de technicien supérieur
 - g. Diplôme universitaire de technologie

- h. Craftsman diploma
 - i. Undergraduate certificate
 - j. VET higher diploma
 - k. Foundation degree
 - l. Higher national diploma
 - m. Higher national certificate
 - n.
9. Progression to higher education:
- a. The share of level 5 qualifications holders that progress to HE: less than 10%, between 10-25 %, between 25-50% or more than 50%;
 - b. Credit transfer course by course
 - c. Block credit transfer
 - d. Agreements between the institutions concerned.
10. The recognition of foreign level 5 qualifications
- a. Professional recognition
 - b. Academic recognition
11. The learner: the composition of the student body (level 5 learners are they considered as being students?):
- a. Age: traditional HE age cohort, adult learners,
 - b. Work experience
 - c. Educational background: secondary VET, general secondary education, level 5 qualification, HE qualification
 - d. In employment
 - e.
12. The learning pathways: school-based or work-based or dual? Part-time and/or full-time? In employment not yet in employment? Different modes of acquisition:
- a. Full-time school/college based programmes including short workplacements or substantial workplacements (up to 1/3?);
 - b. Part-time school/college based programmes including short workplacements or substantial workplacements (up to 1/3?)
 - c. Dual programmes; periods of employment/work combined with school/college based programmes;
 - d. Validation of non-formal learning and informal learning,
 - e. Long workplacement combined with periods of schooling/mandatory courses;
13. The qualification is described in terms of learning outcomes or in terms of competences specific to a profession or occupation mainly based on occupational standards that specify the requirements to perform specific roles or tasks in the labour market.
14. What is the share of the work-based component in the curriculum? The curriculum could be school/college-based including a significant work based element or the focus of the qualification could be more on gaining practical experience and the competences while working.
15. To what extent a level 5 qualification could be achieved through the validation of prior work experience and non-formal and informal learning?
16. What kind of measures have been put in place with regard the transition of applicants holding professionally oriented first cycle qualifications to a primarily academically oriented master programme?
- a. Bridging programmes
 - i. If YES what is the duration (number of ECTS) of the bridging programmes?
 - b. Admission tests
 - c. Work experience

Ministerial communiqués:

Bergen Communiqué:

We adopt the overarching framework for qualifications in the EHEA, comprising three cycles (including, within national contexts, the possibility of intermediate qualifications), generic descriptors for each cycle based on learning outcomes and competences, and credit ranges in the first and second cycles

Leuven Communiqué

Within national contexts, intermediate qualifications within the first cycle can be a means of widening access to higher education.

Bucharest Communiqué

We will explore how the QF-EHEA could take account of short cycle qualifications (EQF level 5) and encourage countries to use the QF-EHEA for referencing these qualifications in national contexts where they exist.

Yerevan Communiqué

(commitments):

to include short cycle qualifications in the overarching framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA), based on the Dublin descriptors for short cycle qualifications and quality assured according to the ESG, so as to make provision for the recognition of short cycle qualifications in their own systems, also where these do not comprise such qualifications;

Report of the Structural Reforms Working Group:

The place of short cycle qualifications in the QF-EHEA (ToR no. 1 and the 2012 report by the Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks)

When Ministers adopted the QF-EHEA in Bergen in 2005, they acknowledged that countries may include short cycle qualifications within the first cycle in their national frameworks but declined to make specific provision for short cycle qualifications within the QF-EHEA:

We adopt the overarching framework for qualifications in the EHEA, comprising three cycles (including, within national contexts, the possibility of intermediate qualifications), generic descriptors for each cycle based on learning outcomes and competences, and credit ranges in the first and second cycles. (Bergen Communiqué)

This was reiterated as late as in 2009:

Within national contexts, intermediate qualifications within the first cycle can be a means of widening access to higher education. (Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué)

In 2012, Ministers recognized that the diversity of qualifications had evolved in relation to the situation in 2005 by stating:

We further commit to referencing first, second and third cycle qualifications against EQF levels 6, 7 and 8 respectively, or against equivalent levels for countries not bound by the EQF. We will explore how the QF-EHEA could take account of short cycle qualifications (EQF level 5) and encourage countries to use the QF-EHEA for referencing these qualifications in national contexts where they exist. (Bucharest Communiqué)

One important development since 2005 is that short cycle programs have gained prominence in many countries and the EQF, adopted in 2008, includes a level 5, which is normally the level to which short cycle qualifications, whether in higher education or VET, are referenced¹. While some qualifications referenced against EQF level 5 are not higher education qualifications, many are, and it is worth noting that there are also qualifications at first and second degree level (EQF levels 6 and 7) that are not considered higher education qualifications in the systems to which they belong. It therefore seems incongruent that the QF-EHEA does not acknowledge the widespread existence of short cycle degrees in national systems.

It is also worth underlining that national education systems may include levels other than those included in the overarching frameworks as long as national frameworks are self-certified and referenced against the QF-EHEA and the EQF. For example, while the EQF comprises 8 levels, the number of levels in national frameworks currently ranges from 7 to 12. Therefore, including short cycle qualifications in the QF-EHEA will in no way oblige countries to include such qualifications in their national frameworks but it would give explicit recognition to the fact that many national frameworks do include short cycle qualifications.

Regardless of whether the short cycle qualifications are included in the overarching framework of qualifications of the EHEA, the qualifications framework should provide for clear articulation pathways connecting the short cycle qualifications to the first cycle (bachelor) qualifications. Public authorities should encourage higher education institutions in cooperation with the other providers of short cycle study programs to develop those articulation pathways.

Recommendations

At their 2015 meeting, Ministers should decide to include short cycle qualifications in the overarching framework of qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA) based on the Dublin descriptor² for short cycle qualifications and quality assured according to the ESG in order to give explicit recognition to the fact that many national frameworks now include short cycle qualifications but without an obligation on countries to include such qualifications in their NQF.

With regard to recognition and articulation we can distinguish the following cases:

Country of origin	Receiving country	Recognition	articulation
SCHE level 5 qualif.	SCHE level 5 qualif.	++	++

¹ See the CEDEFOP Briefing Note “The hidden potential of level 5 qualifications” (June 2014), available at http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/9089_en.pdf.

² http://paginas.fe.up.pt/~sfeyo/Docs_SFA_Bologna/120_Ref%20Doc_20041018%20%5BJQIG%20Dublin%20Descriptors%5D.pdf.

HVET level 5 qualif	SCHE level 5 qualif.	-/+	-/+
SCHE level 5 qualif.	HVET level 5 qualif.	+	+
HVET level 5 qualif.	HVET level 5 qualif.	++	-/+
Non-formal learning.	SCHE level 5 qualif	-/-	-/-
SCHE level 5 qualif.	Non-formal learning.	-/+	++
HVET level 5 qualif.	Non formal learning.	+	-/+

Articulation means seamless transition between short cycle and bachelor degree programme.

++ means: recognition and articulation will be very easy (technically spoken) graduates can move very smoothly from one country to the other country, in case the qualifications belong to the same category or sector ;

+ means that recognition and articulation could give rise to some questions but will be facilitated if the SCHE level 5 qualifications has also a significant vocational orientation; articulation in the receiving country should be relatively easy because the qualification in the country is already part of higher education;

-/+: means that recognition and articulation could rise some questions and will less easy because the qualifications are part of different categories because recognition and articulation could be realized if there is enough political will;

(in general my opinion expressed in the table was led by the assumption that articulation is easier between SCHE level 5 qualifications and bachelor degree programmes than between HVET level 5 qualifications and bachelor degree programmes)

- **SCHE**: short cycle higher education: (part of the HE QF)
- **HVET**: higher vocational education and training (not part of the HE-QF but level 5 qualification)
- **Non-formal learning**: level 5 mainly based on work-based learning, no formal educational/college based programme leading to the qualification.

Factors facilitating articulation/permeability:

- The qualifications are part of the same QF or the same HE sector;
- The qualifications are being awarded by similar institutions (HEIs);
- Use of LO for describing the qualifications and the study programmes;
- Use of ECTS;
- The study programmes are quality assured in accordance with the ESG;

Factors hindering articulation/permeability:

- The qualifications belong to different QF or educational sectors;
- LO are not used;
- ECTS is not used;
- Different QA approach.

Rationales for permeability/articulation:

- Social dimension and widening participation;
- Demand of the labour market;
- The missing link in the QF;
- The development of the knowledge society and the need for upskilling the workforce;
- Creating flexible learning paths;
- No death-ends in the HE system in order to avoid segregation
- To form part of the lifelong learning provisions.

Arguments against articulation:

- Graduates from level 5 are missing academic skills and knowledge
- Demands of labour market remain unfulfilled;
-