

Shaping level 5 – ETF Conference

7-8 June 2018, Sermig, Torino, Italy

Conclusions and follow-up actions

Context, scope and aims of the conference

This multi-country event brought together experts from ETF partner countries from all regions, the European Commission and EU Member States, and the Council of Europe, to showcase good practice in Level 5 qualifications and provision, offer solutions to common challenges and to identify what actions ETF partner countries might take to improve and boost qualifications at this key level.

While ETF had previously initiated events on this topic, this time we co-designed and organised its themes and agenda with the Council of Europe. Around 60 experts, officials and stakeholders participated in the event, including representatives from 14 ETF partner countries—Albania, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Israel, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, Morocco, Serbia, Tunisia, Turkey and Ukraine. Experts from EU countries, the European Commission, Cedefop and the Council of Europe shared their expertise.

Outcomes and outputs of the event

Outcomes of the event were identification by the fourteen participating partner countries of priorities in implementing Level 5 qualifications, and determination of specific actions.

Principal outputs were the country analyses, or SWOTs, summarising weakness, strengths and proposed actions in Level 5 qualifications and provision. Partner Country experts actively developed these during the event.

Qualifications and provision leading to EQF level 5 (L5)

Provision of L5 qualifications is heterogeneous, as programmes leading to level 5 can be delivered in higher education (HE) institutions, or by vocational education and training (VET) colleges, and in some countries, access to these programmes can be achieved via validation of non-formal learning. Learners at L5 are also very heterogeneous in background, age and work experience. Though qualitative data is often not available, there is some indication that L5 is attractive for students with a VET background who seek to increase their progression opportunities. The second important target group is adults in employment who want to update their skills and competencies.

Some L5 qualifications in partner countries provide a double function i.e. both employability on graduation with a certificate at L5 and an opportunity for further study, e.g. in Belarus, Ukraine. In others, often in the Balkans, the purpose is employability

more than access to further or higher education. In the European Union, by contrast, about half of qualifications at this level are short-cycle HE.

Elements of dual education are being introduced, so close cooperation with companies is needed. In Belarus, there is a concerted effort with the involvement of sectoral committees to redefine the content of the construction sector development, looking at future labour market needs. Such cooperation also helps to get investment.

In France, the government is making all HE qualifications oriented to labour market access. Curricula is structured around developing competences. The state has established and regulated qualification types, and reduced the numbers of diplomas, rationalising the process. There is a focus on transversal skills and employability and promotion of validation of non-formal learning. Level 5 programmes, convincingly, see low drop-out rates.

Work based learning (WBL) is regarded as a significant aspect of any L5 development agenda but many are not fully aware of its scope, potential and implications. Many types of WBL (e.g. apprenticeships, work placements, job-shadowing, schools-based enterprise, internships, etc.) can be offered by employers, HEI, colleges and schools. Best practice is to ensure that WBL is fully integrated into any new L5 qualifications, with seamless pathways for progression.

Qualifications should be aimed at individual career perspectives and not be too tightly bound to specific occupations. They must retain labour market relevance, including the basis in occupational standards but they should also allow for the learner to progress to related qualifications at higher levels. This means also incorporating core skills such as languages, ICT, team-working etc. into programme modules and qualification units. Teacher training needs to change to cater more to the adult learner. Also, teachers need better skills to work more with employers.

We should also ensure that programmes and qualifications allow for the incorporation of individual, citizen and social dimensions.

A clear international, shared, understanding of the typology of Level 5 qualifications and nomenclature used to describe them would be useful.

It might help if we can rebrand Level 5 as a collective title. As it is now, it is rather bland, as well as meaningless to many people e.g. parents. Associate Degree has name recognition that “Level 5” has not. But of course there are many types of Level 5 qualification.

Use of learning outcomes

Learning outcomes-based modules and units reinforce integration of knowledge, skills and competencies. Outcomes facilitate performance assessment, which is relevant to the workplace, where assessment is often work-based.

Modularisation brings assessment forward and makes teaching and learning better integrated, so assessment can become more holistic. When WBL is integrated in learning, the work based element needs to support what learners did in learning. It is expected that learners will demonstrate what was taught, so teachers can adapt the programme accordingly.

HE and VET cooperation

An important backdrop event to the conference was the meeting of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) ministers, on 25 May in Paris. Ministers adopted the Paris Communiqué. It strengthens support for the higher education short cycle as an independent stand-alone qualification and as a recognised part of higher education. In many EHEA countries, there has been practice to exclude Level 5 from higher education.

There was a widespread view that the HE and VET relationship is complex and sensitive. While NQFs usefully link the sectors through their common levels of learning outcomes, other barriers remain. Some of these are technical, e.g. different credit systems, others are more institutional or social e.g. parental guidance steers offspring to a bias to university application. There can be traditional opposition from HE to linking with VET colleges or accepting wider guidance from government to make qualifications more labour market oriented. Often, the absence of NQFs prevents vertical and horizontal linking. There is imperfect use of credit systems, impeding HE to VET permeability.

In some countries, as in Portugal, we see HE and VET providers working in partnership, so that a qualification is offered by the two parties – learners take the general components of modules or units at the university or HE institutions (HEI), and the technical component at the VET college. In Turkey, the system of colleges is integrated with HEIs, so that there is implicit trust, allowing learners to progress onto HE if they want to.

In Georgia, the authorities are currently reforming the NQF, whose centrepiece is integrating HE to VET structures and levels. The reform includes qualifications at L5 e.g. the higher professional diploma and associate degree. Advantages of implementing short cycle programme (associate degree) include development of a Lifelong learning (LLL) system; increasing employability, diversity of education programmes; and strengthening social partnership. In 2017, 20 new VET standards were approved for L5.

In Kazakhstan, Level 5 programmes (Applied Bachelor Degrees) are two-to-three years and have a strong focus on practical work. Level 5 programmes will have credits inspired by ECVET. Prior to introducing the new Applied Bachelor degrees, Kazakhstan introduced an NQF, which linked general, VET and HE in a unified qualifications framework. Accreditation of Level 5 providers has been especially important to ensure high trust and promote quality provision.

Countries design links between HE and VET into laws, so that they stipulate options for linkages and progression – that HEIs, for example, recognise VET qualifications or outcomes achieved for access to short-cycle courses.

On September 4th, 2018 the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) national correspondents will explore issues associated with level 5 qualifications issues, including how far NQFs are reflecting intercultural learning and democratic citizenship. The community of practitioners is the best space to get the debate going.

Employability and employer engagement

Level 5 qualifications should be promoted by partner country governments as an alternative after secondary school as the traditional route through higher education leaves many HE graduates struggling for employment.

In the Netherlands, the Rotterdam Academy collaborates with local employers from maritime and associated services sectors who are engaged in curricula design, and offering internships. Much of this employer input is driven by local needs and conditions. This cooperation has raised employability of the Academy graduates, who are highly sought after and enter the job market in high numbers. Also, in the Turkish case VET colleges have embedded links with local industry. Colleagues from Israel and Serbia pointed out that where employer input was missing, employers complained they had to retrain graduates.

The US community college Associate Degree graduates often go into employment rather than further study, so both individual and societal needs, including those of local employers, are met. This way, also career development and national skill needs are met in the longer term.

International qualifications are valuable currency. But most partner countries still exclude them from their national qualifications systems. Countries should seek to ensure legislation and procedure allow for this opening. Countries should also ensure that legislation on qualifications ensures linkages between higher education and VET.

Role of National Qualifications Frameworks

NQFs can be used to bracket different types of Level 5 qualification together, in addition to facilitating access and progression and movement between providers in HE and VET. NQFs also structure validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) or recognition of prior learning (RPL), providing common level descriptors and incorporating common assessment standards. Conversely, participants reported that the absence of NQFs, or their partial or slow development, hinders forming paths between HE and VET.

The creation of NQFs that embrace lifelong learning is a way to bridge VET and HE. However, without effective implementation mechanisms little can be achieved. The seamless merging and national acceptance of new level 5 qualifications is frustrated by the continued existence of structural barriers between level 5 and HE that remain embedded in many NQF.

Furthermore, the widespread existence of poorly-defined learning outcomes and competences linked to vague level descriptors inhibits the creation of effective standards - improved subject and sectoral standards (and quality assurance systems) are required to aid the development of better, and more easily integrated, VET and HE qualifications. Few countries have effective mechanisms to measure and evaluate the success of their reforms.

Countries need to institutionalise their stakeholder platforms and make these permanent. There is still institutional fragmentation, so there is a need to define institutional roles and functions.

Quality assurance is still fragmented and not yet oriented to outcomes-based qualifications. We also need to see a wider set of types of qualification in use.

It would be useful to accelerate development of new, outcomes-based qualifications; and define and use levelling methodologies to place them in the NQF. Too many L5 qualifications are not in the framework.

Parity of esteem between VET and HE is important. Partner countries could go beyond Level 5 in VET, as all levels of an NQF should be open to VET qualifications, including levels 6 to 8.

Country roadmaps: priorities and actions

During the event, experts worked in country groups to identify key challenges, note progress, and set out some actions to support implementation of Level 5 qualifications and provision.

Some common challenges were poor HE to VET relationships, insufficient short courses available to adult learners, poor definitions of qualifications, insufficient practical components available in Level 5 programmes and the related issue of poor employer to education links.

Strengths of current systems were support, at least in principle, from governments and employers, in some cases strong social partner interest and action via Sector Skills Councils etc., the restructuring in some countries of qualifications systems by the NQF to establish linkages across education sub-systems, established legal bases, and in some countries strong labour market demand.

Common actions to go ahead included finalising laws, training of teachers, awareness measures, pilot projects, modernisation of curricula to integrate traditionally separate learning paths, new programmes and review of learning outcomes in the qualifications.

These tables below summarise country analyses made in Torino.

Albania				
Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats	Proposed Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More learning opportunities in line with legal frame - Political willingness to address the 5th level qualifications - Support for professional development and employment policies - Modernise legal framework on 5th level of qualifications (New VET Law + New HE Law + AQF Law (amended)). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Poor partnership between HEIs and VET institutions - Mismatch between Labour market demands and 5th Level qualifications's offer - No progress routes to HE system through LO from 5th Level qualifications. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Newly adopted AQF law including 5th level qualifications - VET institutions benefit a larger autonomy to diversify provision; - Building a communication strategy to implement 5th Level qualifications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Added funding means to better support the implementation of 5th level qualifications - Lack of qualified HR - Lack of sectorial labour market data. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Completing the legislative frame on 5th level Qualifications - Capacity building of policy makers and teaching staff - Qualitative 5th level qualifications design.
Azerbaijan				
Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats	Proposed Actions
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.Unified educational area 2.Ensuring the continuity of education 3.Access to educational programmes and qualifications 4. Possibilities to continue education by speciality 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. After graduation from college people go to work and do not wish to continue studies 2. The change of speciality extends the length of studies 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Opportunities to get a job in the field studied 2. Extending opportunities to participate in the labour market. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. training is too long and rigid to respond to the changing labour market needs 2. Obsolescence of qualifications on L5 hinder going from one level to another. 	None
Belarus				
Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats	Proposed Actions

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The presence of the scientific-methodological body in between the labour market and VET (RIPO) The sector skills councils have been created with the participation of VET and HE providers, social partners, sectoral ministries The update of the content of education is done with the participation of social partner Introduction of new professions and qualifications that are relevant to the labour market needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demographic decrease Guidance of the youth towards HE Low attractiveness of VET Resistance of VET teachers to change The lack of the independent system of certification 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EU Project in Belarus on “Modernisation of VET system” Development of networking and cooperation between VET and HE, for the development of applied qualifications on the bases of the newly created resources centres. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quick technological change and digitalisation of companies Lack of information and knowledge on the skills needed for future Unforeseen changes of the labour market 	None
Georgia				
Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats	Proposed Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New NQF – based on EQF – LLL Clear vision/policy Legal framework NQF implementation action plan Highly motivated stakeholders and Labour market 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gap between VET and HE systems No experience – short cycle programmes Low awareness of VET 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> International partnership Diversity of educational programmes Introduce work based learning with the help of private sectors Collaboration between VET and HE Improve services to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficulties in the implementation process Lack of human resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pilot projects Analyse results Promote communication between educational institutions and labour market.

		support educational institutions		
Israel				
Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats	Proposed Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Level 5 is well established (since the beginning of Israel) - There's a strong demand and understanding of the needs of high skilled technicians (level 4) and practical engineers (level 5) - The current system of Level 5 is well acknowledged by all partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of clear definition of Level 5 role - Two Ministries deal with Level 5 - Not enough practical experience and collaboration with employers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Willingness and understanding of the need to develop technology education - Currently Israel is working on its NQF 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ongoing decrease of level of students - Easier access to HE in Israel - Lack of flexibility - Reduction of productivity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Round table of all stakeholders - Better collaboration with countries that have a well-established Level 5 (NQF + EQF)
Kazakhstan				
Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats	Proposed Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Separate level in NQF and education system *there is a concept of development and implementation of educational programmes *There are HEIs who carry out such programmes *Demand of the labour market *Raising the competitiveness and mobility of the graduates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Not popular in comparison with HE * Transfer of credits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. preparation of middle level managers in demand on the labour market 2. Lifelong learning Raising the status of VET system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1.Low enrolment in study groups 2. The fact that colleges are turning into higher colleges in massive numbers 	None
Kosovo				
Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats	Proposed Actions

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Law on national qualifications (NQF) - Occupational standards for Level 5 developed - Process of accreditation - Qualifications developed (2-MEST – Ministry of Education, Sciences and Technology) (10+ private providers) - Administrative instructions on Level 5 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Level 5 criteria need to be developed - Titles of qualifications defined - Lack of information (promotion) - Lack of pedagogical and andragogic guides and instructions - Lack of teacher /professor's development - Lack of funds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Employability - Strengthen of VET provision - Link with HE - Mobility - LLL (Life Long Learning) context 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Labour Market (LM) acceptance - HE acceptance 	Development of EU process/policy on Level 5 qualifications
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Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats	Proposed Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Documents for post-secondary education - State priority for post-secondary education - Existing educational programmes (no LO based) - Accredited providers for this level of qualifications - 3 new developed qualifications LO based – modular (SO, SQ and EP) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Existing laws are not harmonised - Insufficient communication between the labour market and the education system - Old educational programmes without LO - No credits for value in programmes - No collected data system for needs of qualifications - Low awareness of the population about the opportunities and the benefits of post-secondary education - Level 5 is not recognized and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Existing laws are harmonized - Re-designed educational programmes - Increasing awareness for the benefits of Level 5 qualifications - Development of Skills Observatory - QA system will target Level 5 - Developed new qualifications for Level 5 (modular) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Limited support from the institutions - No financial support - Political instability does not ensure long term commitment 	

	attractive by the higher education - Lack of integrations between level 5 and higher education	- Financial support (EU funds, national budget, etc.)		
Moldova				
Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats	Proposed Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Legal basis A. 2013-2020 Strategy for VET Development B. 2014 Educational Code C. 2015 List of the profiles of professional training D. 2017 Law on the confirmation of NQF <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2. The lack of the age barrier for the education and learning 3. Will facilitate mobility 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The lack of the common principle on the level of the countries – the problem with the recognition of qualifications The lack of educational standards Programmes are not accredited Labour market is not interested in the development of Level 5 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Short cycle 2. Developments for the regulated professions (medicine) 3. Access to HEI 4. The use of elements of dual education 5. The use for the LLL / VNFIL 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Attractiveness The non-recognition of ECTS when entering the HEI Insufficient involvement of labour market 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To sum up the principles and criteria of the development on the European level for the recognition and validation of non-formal competences LLL Modernisation of the curricula
Morocco				
Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats	Proposed Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Common level to the 3 VET sub-components Short cycle to access to labour market Appropriate answer against the quick changes of labour market 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Problem of bridges among the 3 VET sub-components Heterogeneity of pedagogical approaches (APC – Approche Par Compétences et PPO – Pédagogie Par Objectifs) Overabundance of level 5 graduate workforce, in 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access to a high qualification through the experience acquired Learners fluidity and mobility across the 3 VET 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Cannibalisation” between level 5 and level 6 qualifications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regulatory mechanisms and Quality Assurance (within NQF) Harmonisation of Level 5 Learning Outcomes (LO) of 3 VET sub-components

	particular in the tertiary sector (about 100 000 graduates per year) - Differentiated quality between VET and HE	sub-components - Provisioning middle management jobs - Increased competitiveness / productivity		- Instituting LLL (Life Long Learning) - Instituting the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)
Serbia				
Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats	Proposed Actions
Huge Labour Market demand (welding, some IT professions)	At the moment no permeability to level 6/7	Develop better connection to level 6/7 Decrease unemployment rate	*Lack of support from universities and higher professional schools *Conflict of jurisdiction between VET and HE councils and bodies	*Creating national workgroup for level 5 (including all stakeholders) *Lobbying in HE *Creating programs and accreditation of providers
Tunisia				
Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats	Proposed Actions
Very attractive level for learners as well as for employers Helps pathways from VET to HE	exclusively covered by HE the training is theoretical rather than practical diplomas not formalised in terms of learning outcomes	Introduction of new VET diploma as part of NQF revision Resources from EU donors	Difficult to - formalise pathways between VET and HE review HE diplomas including level 5 ensure coherence of pedagogical approaches between Level 5 and Level 4.	1 benchmarking 2 establish dialogue between all stakeholders 3 define pilot specialities 4 develop appropriate design 5 identifier the profile of trainers and ensure their training
Turkey				
Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats	Proposed Actions
- Awareness and acceptance in Labour Market - Existence for a long period of time	- Access of General Secondary graduates - Lower or same wages with IVET graduates	- Rapid change in the industry	- Inconsistencies among higher	- Update of programmes based on National

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Levelling Associate Degree programmes and vocational qualifications into the TQF (Turkish Qualifications Framework) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Insufficiencies of labs and workshops 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Progression to Bachelor's programmes - Widespread of Higher Vocational Schools 	<p>Vocational Schools</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increasing attractiveness of Bachelor's programmes 	<p>Occupational Standards (NOSs)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Alignment of Learning Outcomes - Accreditation of Associate Degree Programmes - Improving the Quality of Level 5 qualifications - Improving cooperation with Industry or LM (Labour Market).
Ukraine				
Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats	Proposed Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Needs of the labour market - Relatively good practice of training - Flexibility in the preparation of new skills - Relatively good links with real companies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Outdated material-technical base - Deficit of training staff specialised for level 5 - Decreasing interest from students - Aging education contents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Links and progression to higher education - Possibly rapid requalification of graduates - Possibility to create multifunctional training centres for initial training and retraining - Adult learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Growing labour migration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - See opportunities

Follow-up actions

ETF will:

- 1) Incorporate outcomes from this event, in particular the results of the SWOT analyses, into planning for bilateral country interventions from 2019;
- 2) With the partner countries, follow up from September 2018 their proposals developed at the Torino event, to check progress and plans.

ETF and the Council of Europe will:

- 1) Cooperate in planning actions and publications related to Level 5 qualifications and provision.

Materials

Participants can access relevant materials here:

Level 5 materials

<http://europa.eu/!PP93YJ>

Paris Communique

<http://www.ehea2018.paris/Data/ElFinder/s2/Communique/EHEAParis2018-Communique-final.pdf>