



# SCHE

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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SHORT-CYCLE  
QUALIFICATIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

PERSPECTIVE OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION



Co-funded by  
the European Union

# EURASHE

European Association for the Applied Sciences in Higher Education

- Formed in 1990
- Secretariat office in Brussels
- **84 members:**
  - 57 Full Members
    - 12 national associations
    - 45 individual HEIs
  - 13 Affiliate Members outside the EHEA
  - 14 Associate Members
- +500 HEIs represented in 34 countries



Current Buzzwords:  
Skills, economy, resillience, competitiveness.



In paralel:

- relevance of HE degrees,
- reskilling-upskilling
- growing life expectancy,
- demographic fall
- raise of non-degree education,
- growing demand for education
- inclusion and access
- economic and housing crisis



# Lifelong Learning and skills discourse on the rise

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„Member States should:

*Use* the available 'granular' *data* and  
*Revise* their education and training *curricula*,

Give more attention to *adult learning* and

*Reform vocational* training.”



„deliver higher levels of basic and advanced skills

provide opportunities for people to regularly update and learn new skills

facilitate recruitment by businesses across the EU

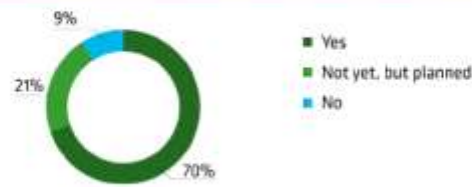
attract, develop and retain top talent in Europe”



# Institutions exploring the „non-full degree” areas – outlook next years?

Figure 30: Offer of non-degree programmes or courses (learning certificates, badges or micro-credentials)

Q24. Does your institution offer non-degree programmes or courses (learning certificates, badges or micro-credentials)? Please choose one option. N=486.



Between half and two thirds of institutions also identify a number of challenges related to their offer, such as<sup>24</sup>:

- ❖ identifying the demand for such programmes or courses (71%)
- ❖ recognition (68%)
- ❖ issues related to fees and funding (67%)
- ❖ finding a business model (65%)
- ❖ legal and regulatory obstacles at national/system level (63%)
- ❖ credit award upon completion (61%)
- ❖ quality assurance (58%)
- ❖ format and design of such courses (58%)
- ❖ defining the status of the learner (56%; see also section 5.2 below)
- ❖ legal and regulatory obstacles within the institution (47%).

Source: EUA trends 2024

Both applied and comprehensive universities are offering more and non-degree education opportunities

LLL and flexibility of learning is clearly underlined in the Torana communique

Upcoming Focus on VET in the Danish Presidency

Union of Skills, integration of the HE sector?

# SCHE by definition – a match to the previous ideas but also a DEGREE

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## ISCED 5: Short-cycle tertiary education

Programmes at ISCED level 5 are short-cycle tertiary education and are often designed to provide participants with professional knowledge, skills and competencies. Typically, they are practice-based and occupation-specific, preparing students to enter the labour market. However, these programmes may also provide a pathway to other tertiary Education programmes. Academic tertiary education programmes below the level of a Bachelor's programme or equivalent are also classified as ISCED level 5.

# Strategic relevance of SCHE

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**Most EHEA countries** have **established short cycle higher education programmes** offering an accessible higher education opportunity for students who are academically less prepared for higher education degree programmes.

- Important component of the higher education policy aiming at enhancing the social dimension of higher education (**widening participation**).
- Short cycle programmes were introduced to widen access and to ensure entry to HE **for non-traditional learners**.
- In some cases, it is also considered as a kind of a **second chance**.
- In many areas short cycle higher education programmes are established in order to meet the **needs** of the society and the **labour market** for people with a **higher vocational training**.

# SHORT CYCLE IN THE BOLOGNA PROCESS: MINISTERIAL COMMITMENTS

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## 2005 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

## 2009: Leuven Communiqué:

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

## 2012 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.

## 2015 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.



# 2018: Paris Communiqué

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*In many of our systems, ECTS based short cycle qualifications play an increasingly important role in preparing students for employment and further studies as well in improving social cohesion by facilitating access for many who would otherwise not have considered Higher education.*

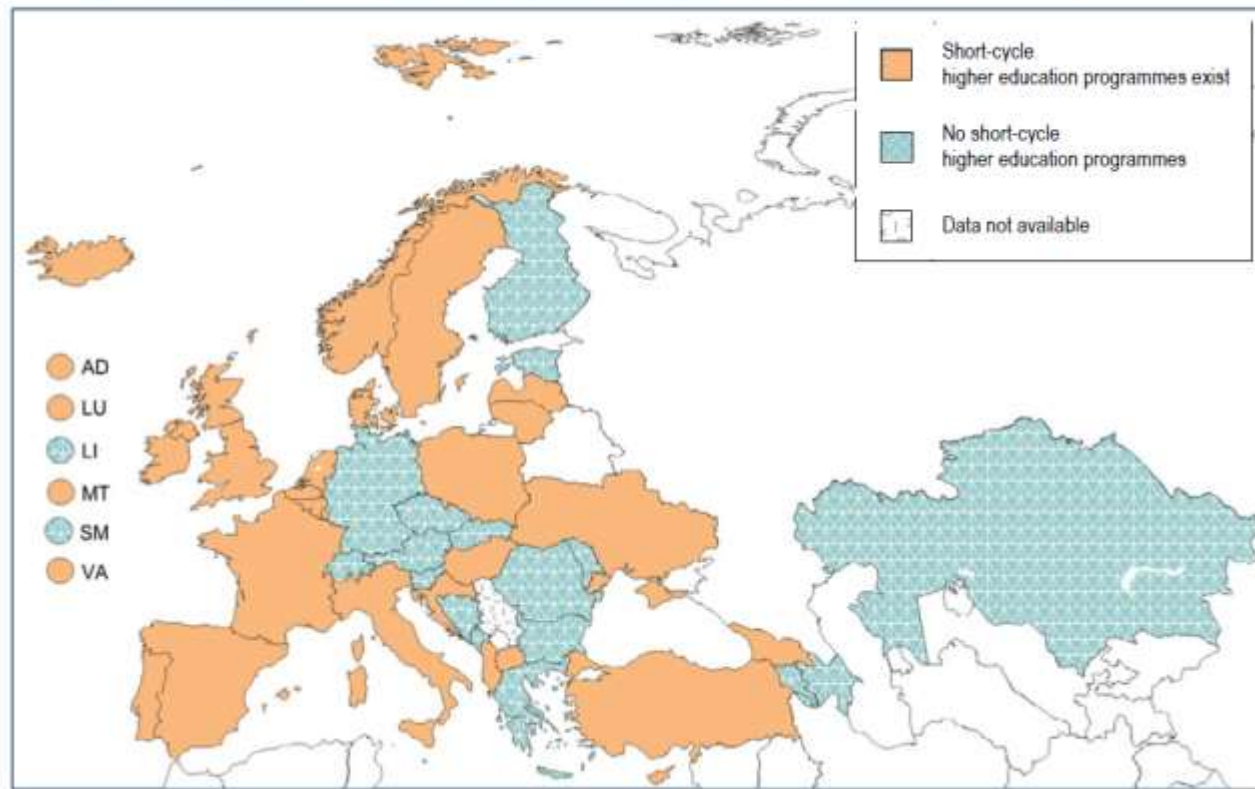
*We are therefore **including short-cycle qualifications as a stand-alone qualification** within the overarching framework of qualifications of the EHEA(**QF-EHEA**). Each country can decide whether and how to integrate short cycle qualifications within its own national framework.*

## **Measures adopted:**

Short cycle qualifications as a stand alone qualification level within the overarching Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA)

# Short cycle Higher Education in EHEA

Figure 2.4: Presence of short-cycle programmes considered as part of higher education, 2022/2023



Source: BFUG data collection.

Figure 2.4 shows the presence of short-cycle programmes considered as part of the national higher education system – in line with the Paris Communiqué decision

# BPIR – quotes and observations

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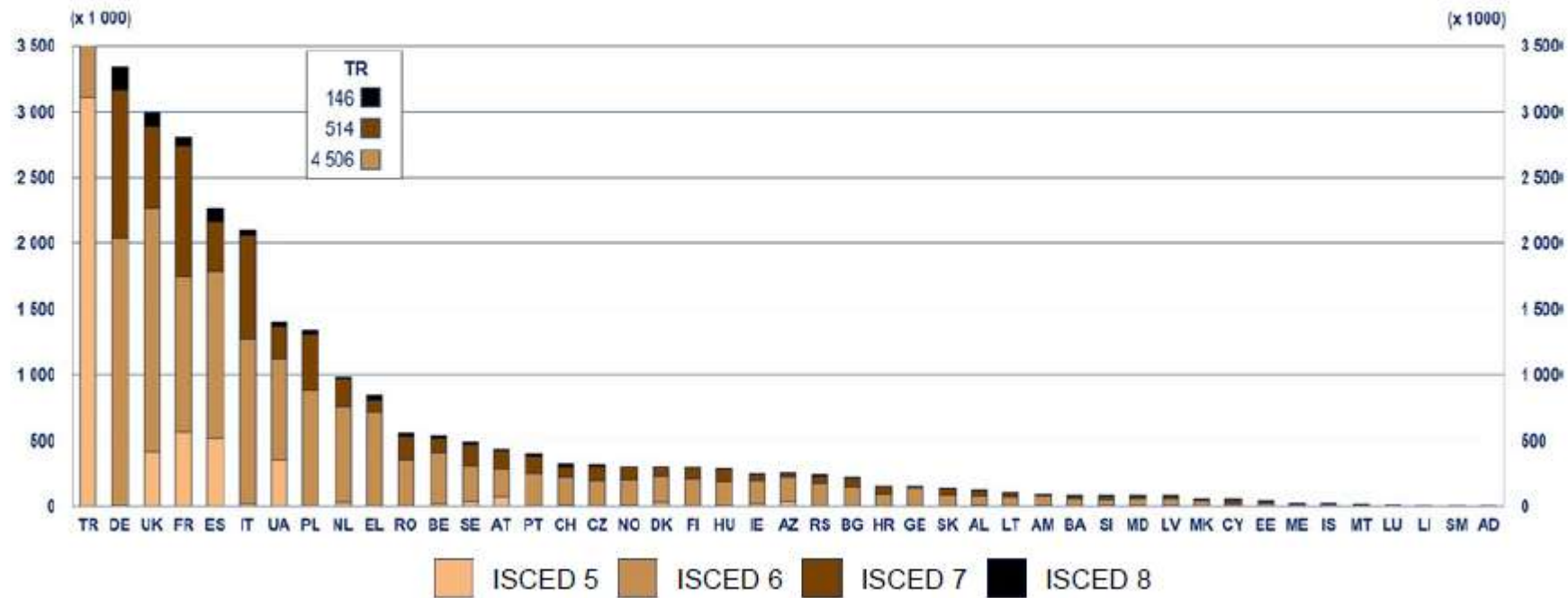
*Short-cycle higher education, now included in the overall Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area, is less coherent and comparable within the EHEA than the other cycles.*

*Countries in the EHEA are still far from reaching a common understanding of short-cycle higher education that is comparable to the situation of the other three cycles.*

*When not recognised as 'higher education', short-cycle programmes are usually categorised as being part of a vocational education system. Indeed, some countries that do not report the existence of shortcycle higher education programmes have students enrolled in ISCED 5 programmes*

# Number of students enrolled in tertiary education by ISCED level, 2020/2021

Figure 1.1: Number of students enrolled in tertiary education by ISCED level, 2020/2021



# Number of students enrolled in tertiary education by ISCED level, 2020/2021

(x 1 000)	TR	DE	UK	FR	ES	IT	UA	PL	NL	EL	RO	BE	SE	AT	PT	CH
ISCED 5	3 114.6	11.0	414.3	565.7	524.3	23.1	357.0	0.5	33.8	:	:	25.1	41.0	74.1	18.1	3.3
ISCED 6	4 506.1	2 032.4	1 844.6	1 185.8	1 263.1	1 244.7	770.6	884.8	730.8	715.1	359.3	379.3	275.3	203.2	231.1	221.8
ISCED 7	514.2	1 115.9	621.2	992.7	377.9	795.7	247.6	431.9	206.2	95.0	178.1	116.6	155.1	141.7	131.0	80.6
ISCED 8	145.7	192.3	113.9	65.1	95.8	33.3	26.7	30.6	16.9	33.7	23.1	18.8	19.1	19.4	23.5	26.7
	CZ	NO	DK	FI	HU	IE	AZ	RS	BG	HR	GE	SK	AL	LT	AM	BA
ISCED 5	1.0	10.7	35.7	:	11.8	22.7	41.5	:	:	0.01	:	2.4	5.8	:	12.3	:
ISCED 6	198.7	198.0	193.9	210.6	183.2	175.2	180.6	180.0	147.8	91.9	139.2	83.2	74.4	75.2	68.9	59.1
ISCED 7	107.2	93.5	69.4	76.0	82.4	42.1	23.8	51.2	72.0	65.1	17.5	48.8	40.5	27.0	10.6	22.5
ISCED 8	21.8	9.3	9.2	18.7	10.1	9.5	3.2	11.4	6.6	3.9	3.8	6.6	3.0	2.7	0.9	1.2
	SI	MD	LV	MK	CY	EE	ME	IS	MT	LU	LI	SM	AD	EHEA		
ISCED 5	10.6	14.7	14.1	:	3.8	:	:	0.8	2.4	0.9	:	:	0.01	5 397.2		
ISCED 6	45.9	44.8	44.2	50.9	23.2	27.5	19.5	14.8	9.3	3.1	0.4	0.8	0.6	19 392.7		
ISCED 7	22.8	18.8	18.2	3.9	24.9	15.2	3.1	5.8	6.1	2.8	0.3	0.08	0.05	7 172.8		
ISCED 8	3.5	2.3	2.0	0.5	1.7	2.3	0.1	0.7	0.6	0.9	0.2	0.01	0.03	1 021.6		

Source: Eurostat, UOE and additional collection for the other EHEA countries.



# Benefits of SCHE

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- Good outcomes in terms of employability
- Applicable to wide range of professions - business, administration, hospitality, ICT...
- Access for non-traditional groups of students –enhanced inclusion
- Innovation of skills & competencies
- Clear involvement of the world of work
- Variety of access routes and pathways
- Curriculum often based on strong work-based learning principle
- Flexibility and responsiveness to actual needs
- Full integration as a stand-alone qualification within QF EHEA (to be reflected upon yet)

# Challenges for the SCHE

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- Identity, mission, purpose: variety of awards/degrees and objectives
- Addressing diverse target groups of learners & their needs
- Diverse provisions and legal framework
- Recognition within HE, recognition internationally
- Links towards VET, permeability between sectors
- Limited involvement in internationalisation (credits, diploma supplement, mobility, projects...)
- Quality assurance not corresponding to HE approaches, use of ESG, independence of accreditation bodies
- Reflecting on research elements in curricula
- Staff profile & capacity

# One issue – many names. And that is just in English!

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*Higher Education Certificate,*

*Undergraduate certificate,*

*Higher Technician,*

*Professional diploma,*

*Advanced Professional Diploma,*

*Interim Qualification,*

*Technological Specialisation Diploma,*

*Higher Education Diploma,*

Diploma of Higher Education,

Undergraduate diploma,

University diploma,

Associate degree,

Foundation Degree,

First Level Professional Higher Education  
Diploma,

Sub-Bachelor,

Professional Bachelor.

# Potential next steps for the SCHE (Chain5)

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Short Cycle: adopted in 2018 by the ministers responsible for HE as a full recognised/stand-alone cycle with in the EHEA

Still – Voluntary(?) for the members in the Bologna Process.

Still - not always accepted by Higher Education Institutions in terms of recognition and access

Next steps for the short cycle?  
common name: Associate degree

-Adressing the four-cycle structure with 4 cycles

-progression from Short Cycle to First Cycle

-International collaboration (joint degrees, Erasmus+ projects)

-Structured dialogue between HE and VET sectors (Policy and practice)

# Summary of recommendations (TPG-A recommendations from QUATRA)

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- **Access to short-cycle studies**

The countries considering the introduction of short-cycle qualifications need to set appropriate entry requirements, i.e., secondary education qualifications that provide access to Higher education in the country in question.

- **Duration and/or volume of study programmes (e.g., ECTS credits)**

Volume of short-cycle study programmes should be expressed in ECTS credits. Countries, introducing or developing the short-cycle qualifications should follow the provisions of the Paris Communiqué that the short-cycle qualifications comprise 90-120 ECTS credits.

- **Access to further studies (i.e., existing bridges to Bachelor's studies)**

The countries planning to introduce short-cycle qualifications should ensure strong pathways to further higher education, especially to first-cycle studies, including validation practices, exemptions and credit transfers.



# Summary of recommendations (TPG-A recommendations)

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- **EQF or QF-EHEA level**

QF level of short-cycle qualifications should correspond to EQF level 5 or QF-EHEA short-cycle to ensure their comparability and international recognition.

- **Quality assurance according to the principles of ESG**

Higher education quality assurance procedures and ESG principles should also apply to short-cycle qualifications.

- **Differentiation between short-cycle qualifications and micro-credentials**

When introducing short-cycle qualifications, the state should clearly define short-cycle qualifications to distinguish them from micro-credentials and/or smaller learning experiences.

- **Recognition of the short-cycle qualifications**

Countries planning to introduce short-cycle qualifications should comply with the Lisbon Recognition Convention (1997) and its subsidiary texts to ensure fair recognition of short-cycle qualifications.

- **Automatic recognition**

The possibility of applying automatic recognition for short-cycle qualifications should be further explored.

Please jump  
for a while to  
the mentimeter

Code: 5627 5144

Thank you!  
Jakub

