The main outcomes of the peer learning activity on qualifications related to level 5 of the EQF

The European Commission, in cooperation with Cedefop, and the Council of Europe will organised a peer learning activity (PLA) on qualifications related to level 5 of the EQF, via national qualifications systems on 19-20 April 2012 in Brussels.

The aim of the PLA was to better understand the variety of qualifications referred to level 5 of the EQF and the main functions fulfilled by these - notably their ability to promote lifelong learning and in serving the needs of the labour market.

Participants in the PLA represented the national correspondents of the QF EHEA, EQF Advisory Group members as well as higher education institutions, quality assurance agencies, employers and trade unions from 21 countries.

The PLA suggested that a wide range of qualifications are allocated to the respective NQF levels equivalent to EQF level 5. Therefore a high number of different institutions and providers are responsible for level 5-qualifications. These different institutions have different backgrounds and are organised very differently (e.g. in terms of autonomous responsibilities for the development of curricula). Moreover, different systems of quality assurance are implemented for qualifications allocated to level 5 and the responsible institutions. Shared confidence in quality assurance is a challenge at level 5 where quality assurance institutions/agencies are different ones.

Qualifications allocated to level 5 are on the interface of the needs of the (national) labour markets in the respective countries and the crucial points of European transparency instruments and level 5 is the level where qualifications from VET and HE meet each other (at least in the European countries where a short cycle programme exists). Moreover, ECVET (European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training) and ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) meet each other at level 5.

1 The detailed PLA report will be circulated among the EQF AG members by the end of June.
On level 5, a high number of qualifications are allocated (or planned to be allocated) which provide direct entrance to the labour market after graduation. These qualifications are oriented towards certain needs of the labour market and are very often developed in cooperation with representatives from the labour market, companies etc.

In some countries short cycle programmes do not necessarily exist by now. But certain development regarding short cycle programmes are going on. Some countries rethink their education systems and will possibly design new qualifications when the demand - either in the labour market or within the education system - exists.

Level 5 is gradually opening up to the development of smaller qualifications. Due to the demand of the labour market for graduates of qualifications on level 5 it seems that smaller qualifications are becoming more important. Thus, it could happen that a "cultural change" starts from big qualifications towards smaller ones.

From the point of view of lifelong learning. EQF level 5 qualifications are often seen as an opportunity for progression to higher levels of learning in the education and training systems. Due to the smaller size of these qualifications, or shorter duration of courses leading to such qualifications, the availability of the recognition of prior learning, they well fit the needs and possibilities of adults, migrants, etc. Often EQF level 5 qualifications, in particular the short cycle qualifications, are the first step in higher education.

Participants in the PLA agreed that exchange of views and systematic analysis of qualifications at EQF level 5 should be continued. EQF level 5 also drew attention to the importance of a better understanding of the learning outcomes approach in the various countries and education and training sub-systems. Therefore, it was suggested at European level a compilation of existing practises or guidance material, building on the existing EQF note on Using learning outcomes, should be developed on the use of learning outcomes.