
BRIEF ANALYSIS OF EU POLICIES AND LEGAL FRAMEWORKS FOR ESTABLISHING PART-TIME AND SHORT-CYCLE STUDIES

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INTRODUCTION

This document sets out the current state of affairs in European Union members and what is desired in Serbia for part-time degrees and short-cycle degrees in higher education. We first outline the basis of this report, then offer some background on higher education in Europe to put short cycle and part-time study in context of the three study cycles. Then we explore short cycle and part-time study in more detail.

This report draws upon two reports as well as a short survey done of partner members. The first useful report is “Short Cycle Higher Education in Europe Level 5: the Missing Link” written in 2011. This documents the status of short cycle education in EU member states at the time and how this relates to education in general as well as within the notion of lifelong learning. The second useful report is from the European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice entitled “The European Higher Education Area in 2015: Bologna Process Implementation Report” written in 2015. It reviews the state of higher education at all three cycles across a wider area, which includes Serbia, and offers some views on short cycle and part time learning too.

The different levels of the educational qualification framework vary across Europe as can be seen in the table below taken from ‘Missing Link’ report mentioned above.

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EQF	QF EHEA		ISCED	
8	Third cycle	Ph.D.	6	
7	Second cycle	Master		
6	First cycle	Bachelor	5A	
		professional bachelor	5B	Most blurred zone of qualifications
5 Higher education & vocational / professional qualifications	Short Cycle within the 1 st cycle	Various titles, degrees		
4	Some Higher Vocational qualifications organised by HEI		4 Post-secondary non-tertiary	
3			3	
2			2	
1			1	

Figure 1: Comparison between EQF– QF-EHEA- ISCED

As can be seen above, level four leaves students at the end of secondary school, from which many can progress into level 6 when they start university. However, this jump isn't possible for all students so a path through level 5 is also necessary in order to ensure that all people can find a path to a suitable career now, or in the future as part of their lifelong learning. This is the other important role of level 5; that it provides a starting place for those who come to their career later, or who need to restart their career due to family issues, restructuring in their career, or other reasons.

This report will use the classification above so that a level 5 qualification, using the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), could become an intermediate stepping stone on the path to higher qualifications, but which would enable the person to enter the labour market at a suitable level of employability. This would be a 'short cycle' within the first cycle of education, of about 120 ECTS within the national context. All references, unless otherwise stated, refer to the EQF level of study.

This 'level 5' is what is found to be needed between secondary school and higher education at university level. It offers a path for many people; those who want to change direction, those who want a more vocational career, and those who have problems with more formal education. It lets students take their education step by step in a steady manner as suits their needs. In addition, many of the level 5 studies are especially useful for non-traditional and mature students.

To that end there are two different paths for level 5 studies. One as seen in Scotland, this is on the path to university education. This is in contrast to another path seen in Serbia and elsewhere, where qualifications for level 5 are more vocational, and therefore lead away from further academic study, but instead lead to higher vocational bachelors and masters degree level qualifications. This also ties in with staff on the vocational tracks also being seen to split their time

between academia and working in industry so that the education they offer is seen as relevant and contemporary.

In addition, 'level 5' studies are also of interest to industry who are being seen to help develop new programmes to suit the needs of their staff now and in the future. Helping to provide direction, industry can help to shape the curricula for these programmes in order to ensure that local employers have staff capable of fulfilling the roles needed.

BACKGROUND OF HIGHER EDUCATION ACROSS EUROPE

There are about 37.2 million tertiary students in the EHEA (academic year 2011/12) with about 82% of these at level 6, and 15.6% in the more occupationally focused level 5, and about 2.7% in levels 7. In Serbia, this was total: 231,661, 178,789 in level 6, 47,322 in level 5 and 5500 in level 7. These represent 77.7% of students in level 6, 20.4% in level 5 and 2.4% in level 7 in Serbia. Across the EHEA countries level 8 students are less than 5% in most countries, but go up to 9% in a number of countries. (EC, 2015, 29-30) It should be noted that level 5 reported here is not short cycle, but merely something at that level of study.

Most EHEA countries use 180 or 240 ECTS for first cycle programmes with 58% and 37% using the former or the latter respectively. Five countries (Denmark, Finland, Germany, Hungary and Poland) add a 30 ECTS requirement for professional training or placements, which then makes for a 210 ECTS programme. (EC, 2015, 52-3)

65% of second cycle programmes mostly use the 120 ECTS model, 16% use 60-75 ECTS, and 13% use 90 ECTS. Unlike first cycle programmes, where the professional programme is longer, in second cycle, the professional programme is usually shorter. (EC, 2015, 53-4)

The use of a national qualification framework was agreed as part of the Bologna process, and the Framework for Qualifications of the EHEA was adopted, and then followed by the European Qualification Framework in 2008 as a translation tool between the two systems. By 2015 22 countries had completed all 10 implementation steps for this. The UK, Estonia, and others have completed this. Serbia is at step 9 with qualifications included in the NQF, and now awaits its self-certification in compatibility with the European Framework for Higher Education. (EC, 2015, 68)

The EHEA provides the basis for recognition of qualifications between its member states and is seen through the use of the ECTS, Diploma Supplement and national qualification frameworks used by its members. Some of this is also codified by national legislation. However, in practice this is mostly done by individual institutions, who base their decisions on commonly used materials from ENIC/NARIC. There is still more work to be done to ensure that recognition of national qualifications and higher education institutional degrees across borders is automatic. (EC, 2015, 79-83)

Fees for home students in the first cycle have been stable since 2012, with most students having to pay something in public higher education institutions. No fees are charged to home students in seven countries including Scotland, while in 16 countries students have to pay fees,

though this might only be a small administrative charge, as in the case of the Czech Republic. How these fees are paid, and who pays them, is more complex and the strain this might put on the student and their family varies widely depending upon the amount of student support available for fees, maintenance and other costs. (EC, 2015, 125-146. It should be noted that nothing is mentioned in this report about funding for short cycle fees.)

Employability, “the ability to gain meaningful employment, to become self-employed, to maintain employment, and to be able to move around within the labour market” (quoted in EC, 2015, 182) is not about having a job, per se, but being equipped with the skills to have a job. In Serbia, this can lead to counter-intuitive outcomes. For example, those with high, medium and low education (High is ISCED 5-6, medium ISCED 3-4 and low is ISCED 0-2) levels in 2013 for 20-34 year olds were 27.9% for high, 21.1% for medium and 25.2% for low education levels. In other words, the higher your education level, the more likely you were to be unemployed. (EC, 2015, 183)

This might be understood to suggest that students might have more success using short cycle programmes to gain the required skills for employment, instead of pursuing a first-cycle programme.

Employer engagement is important for a number of reasons, which is why they are involved in curriculum development and participate in higher education institution decision making bodies across the EHEA. Sometimes this is required, and other times is an option. Sometimes this optionality goes further and employers help to create degrees to meet their needs. (EC, 2015, 199-200)

Sometimes employer engagement is compulsory, such as in Romania where all first cycle degrees, and in Portugal where all short cycle programmes have practical training. This can also be influenced by public funding to support training and internship programmes, even when it is not compulsory. Similarly, dual degree programmes, such as occur in Germany and France, with their mix of theoretical and professional experience also benefit from such funding models. (EC, 2015, 201-202)

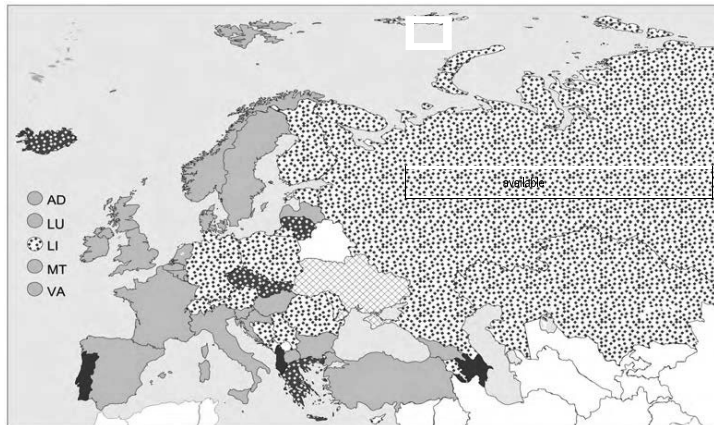
This mixed approach by continues aims to avoid problems later on as not all students can progress from one cycle to the next due to the difference between professional and vocational degrees. This has led to some countries making use of bridging degrees to enable this transition, and to also enable other pathways to higher education, such as recognition of prior learning so that qualifications, or credit might be exempted. (EC, 2015, 123)

SHORT CYCLE PROGRAMMES IN EUROPE

Short cycle programmes account for fewer than 5% of all tertiary students. Short cycle programmes of less than three years cover less than half of the EHEA countries, and do not exist in half of the member countries either. There are now 26 countries that have short cycle

programmes. While most are tied to higher education, this is not always the case and many are aligned with Vocational Education and Training (VET). (EC, 2015, 51)

The issue of how countries class short cycle programmes is still confusing as can be seen in the following illustrations.

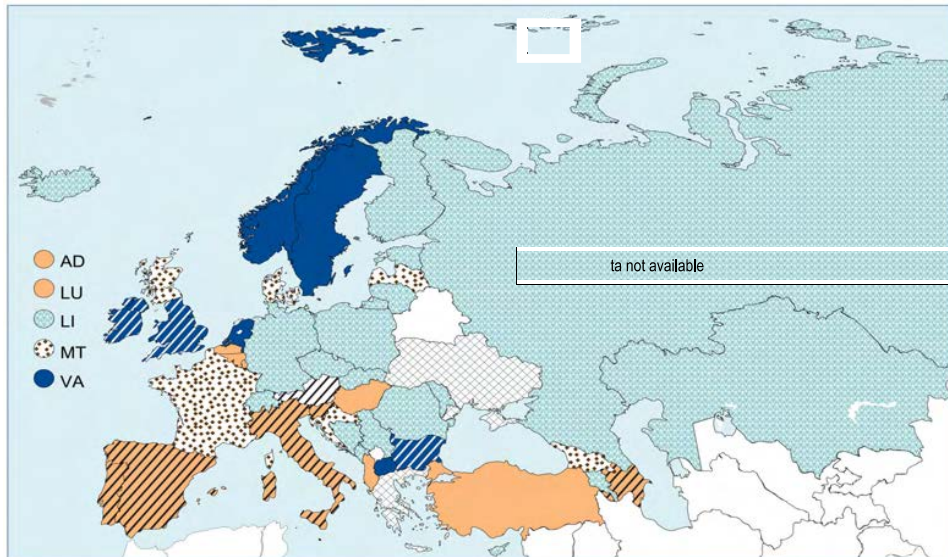


Source: BFUG questionnaire.

Source: EC, 2015, 59

This shows that some have no short cycle programmes as short cycle is part of VET and therefore does not lead to a first cycle degree. Others, like the UK, have various options for their short cycle programmes with different exit paths available to students. (EC, 2015, 58)

The length of short cycle programmes that might feed into a first cycle programme varies from 60 ECTS (one year) to 180 ECTS (three years), however the most common version is 120 ECTS (two years). Some of these lead to professional and/or academic qualifications. This means that not all short cycle programmes can be used as a stepping stone to a first cycle degree. (EC, 2015, 58) The map below indicates how short cycle programmes might contribute to first cycle programmes.



Source: BFUG questionnaire.

Source: EC, 2015, 60

Notice how now Scotland shows options available, and Serbia and Estonia are similar in approach, and how some countries like Ireland enable institutions to set up agreements to articulate from a short cycle programme to a first cycle degree.

In most countries the curriculum for short cycle programmes is a combination of practice and theory with some requiring a work placement due to the professional nature of the programme. Some countries such as the UK, might have different curricula for different institutions depending upon the degree. For example, a Foundation Degree is more likely to have work-based learning and placements than the HND programme. (Kirche, Beernaert, 44-45)

Where the short cycle programme is based around professional practice, then it is expected that the staff will have both academic and professional qualifications. In some countries there is even a minimum requirement for a set percentage of staff to have professional qualifications. Furthermore, many of these professionally trained staff combine their teaching role with professional practice too. (Kirsch, Beernaert, 62-3)

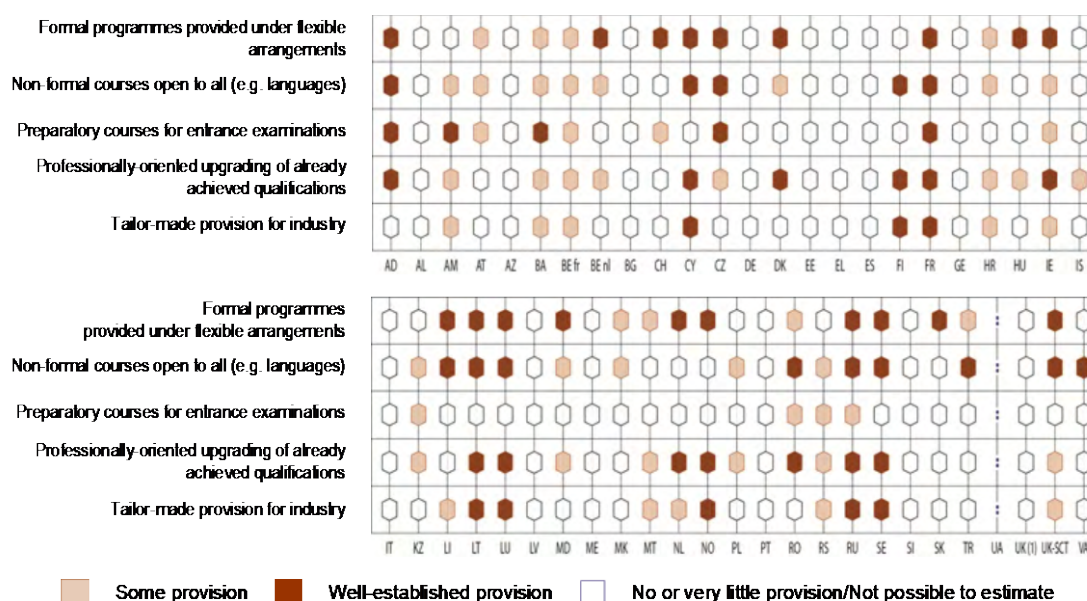
PART-TIME STUDY IN EUROPE

Flexible delivery is seen as part of the approach to lifelong learning taken by a country. Some have enshrined the equal status of the on-campus and the distant learning student, or those who wish to study while working. In addition, it should be noted that there is no one meaning for 'part-time'. In some places it relates only to the notion of time spent learning, while elsewhere it might relate to funding arrangements. (EC, 2015, 152-3)

A common approach is to define ‘part-time’ by the number of credits, the time allowed for completing study, or the theoretical number of hours devoted to studying. Sometimes these are combined for a definition. However, this also means that different combinations end up with the same result. In addition, some countries have no fees for full-time students, but expect part-time students to contribute to their studies, and they might also receive less financial support. (EC, 2015, 153-4. This report has no data on part-time students in Serbia.)

Some part-time study is similar to short cycle in that it offers a variety of options depending upon student circumstances, and sometimes also provides specific options tailored to industry as can be seen in the diagram below. This shows a wide variety of options available in different countries. In particular, it should be noted how part time offerings can be a stepping stone to gaining qualifications for level 5 or level 6 as part of a career change, or for other reasons.

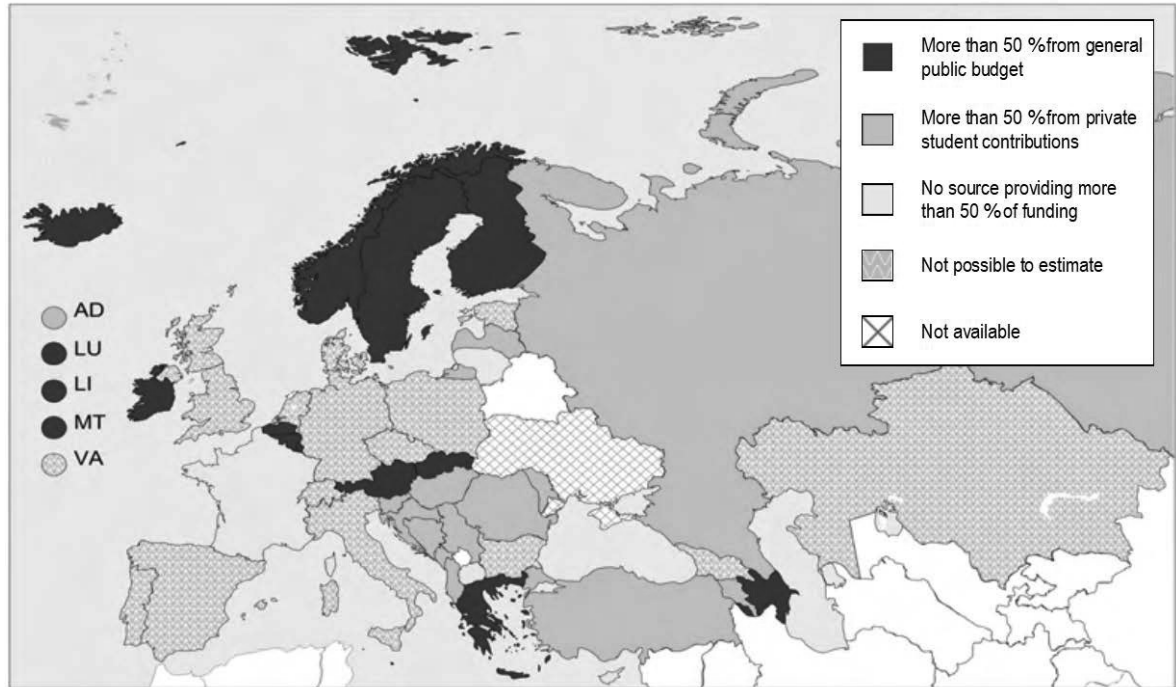
The funding for part time studies depends upon how the countries sees life-long learning. When this is seen part of the national approach to careers, then there is more public funding. Otherwise, as can be seen from the diagram below, funding is a mixture between public and private sources. Some of this private funding is from business, as in Serbia, while elsewhere it is from the students. However, it should be noted that the public funding is not always clear due to the nature of financing and that it only sometimes appears as a line-item in a budget. (EC, 2015, 151-2)



Source: BFUG questionnaire.

UK (*) = UK-ENG/WLS/NIR

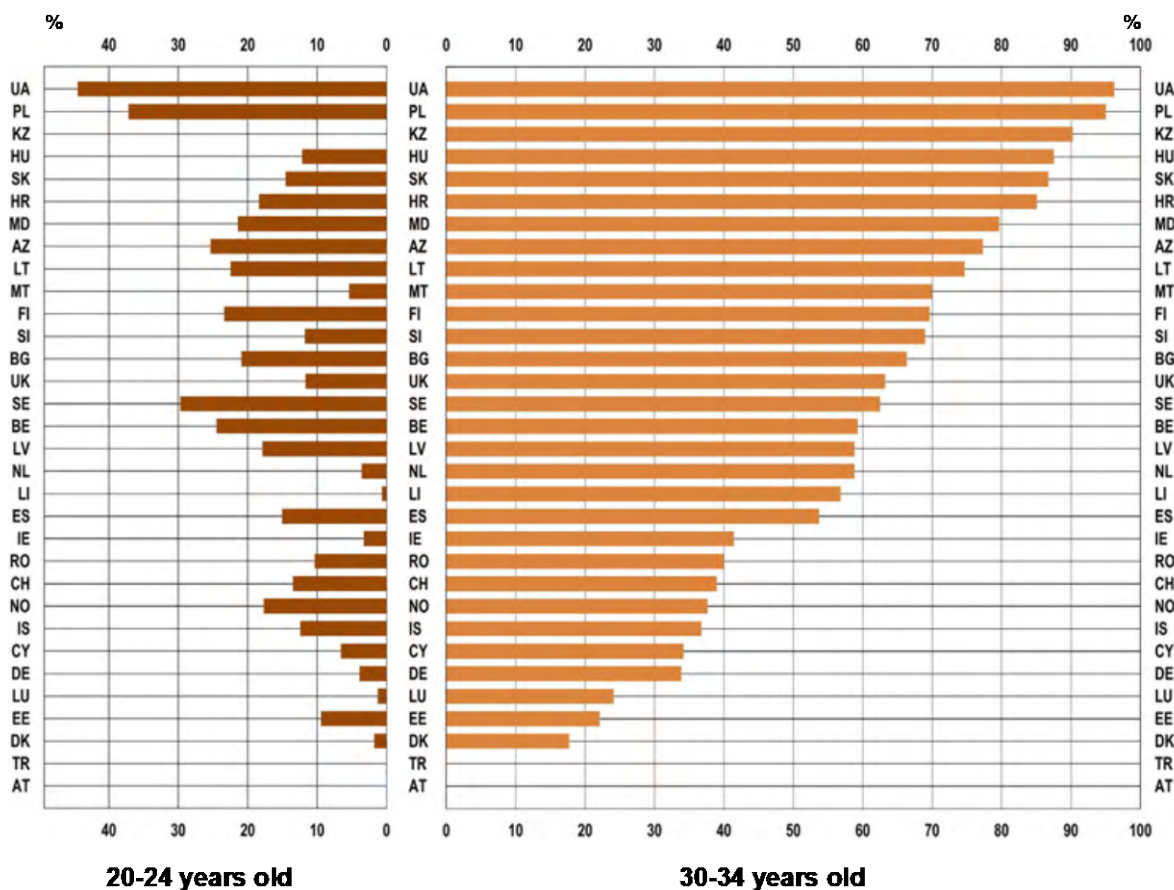
Source EC, 2015, 149.



Source: BFUG questionnaire.

Source: EC, 2015, 151

Part-time students tend to be older students. A number of them are there not long after their first cycle studies, while others might be there ten years later as part of a career change, or due to the need for higher qualifications. Whatever the case, as can be seen from the table below, these students might form a large percentage of students in these age bands. While Serbian data is missing, we can see that almost 70% of students aged 30-34 are part-time, and that only about 12% of the students 20-24 in age are part-time. This suggests, as noted, that different ages of students have different needs, which will need to be addressed accordingly.



	UA	PL	KZ	HU	SK	HR	MD	AZ	LT	MT	FI	SI	BG	UK	SE	BE
20-24 years old	44.5	37.2	:	12.2	14.6	18.4	21.4	25.3	22.4	5.4	23.4	11.7	20.9	11.7	29.7	24.5
30-34 years old	96.3	95.0	90.3	87.5	86.8	85.1	79.7	77.3	74.7	70.0	69.6	69.0	66.3	63.2	62.5	59.3
	LV	NL	LI	ES	IE	RO	CH	NO	IS	CY	DE	LU	EE	DK	TR	AT
20-24 years old	17.9	3.6	0.6	15.0	3.3	10.3	13.5	17.7	12.4	6.5	3.9	1.3	9.4	1.7	0.0	0.0
30-34 years old	58.8	58.8	56.8	53.7	41.5	40.0	39.0	37.6	36.8	34.2	33.9	24.1	22.1	17.7	0.0	0.0

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

Source: EC, 2015, 158

RECOMMENDATION

The recommendation of this report is for Serbia to offer short cycle programmes, which enables students a path between secondary and university with vocational qualifications on the way. This should enable students to stop and start their career and then come back to level 5 if they need to, or want to have a career change. To that end there should also be 'bridge programmes' so that students who have skills and qualifications in one area can also transition into another area as

easily as possible. In the meantime, however, the credits accumulated for different courses should be combined towards continuing education at university level as needed. Specific examples to explore further would be Estonia, Scotland, and Ireland.

In addition, short cycle and first cycle programmes from outside Serbia should also be recognised. This will widen the pool of options for students, as well as to enable others to study short cycle programmes in Serbia. This can best be done by accrediting programmes based on learning outcomes of the students.

With respect to part-time degrees, then legislation should enable students of any age to study part-time. In particular, this should be as flexible as possible for older students, who might have family work commitments, which constrain their options for study. Whether the time measures, or credit measures are used to determine how fast, or slow this happens is probably not important. The key factor would be that it can be available to as many students as possible to enable them to move from their current qualifications to the ones they need for their new, or desired role.

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Extras

<https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/en/compare> offers some comparisons of EQFs across Europe