

Progression towards Research as established by the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)

This report outlines the main criteria provided by the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) regarding potential job mobility and academic levels between Portugal and Spain.

The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) ¹is a common reference system with eight levels that compares educational and professional qualifications across Europe, based on learning outcomes: knowledge, skills, and responsibility/autonomy. This system categorizes the levels of the educational programs offered at ISEC Lisbon in Portugal. It also facilitates professional and academic mobility by linking with other qualifications frameworks, such as the MECES in Spain, which is the case compared in this report.

Table 1. General descriptors by level

<i>Level</i>	<i>Knowledge</i>	<i>Skills</i>	<i>Responsibility/Autonomy</i>
5	Extensive specialized knowledge (factual/theoretical), with awareness of limitations	Creative solutions to abstract problems; review of own/others' performance	Management/supervision in unpredictable contexts
6	Advanced, with a critical understanding of theories/principles	Solving complex/unpredictable problems; innovation in a specialized field	Management of complex projects; professional development of groups
7	Highly specialized, a basis for original thought/research	Integrate multidisciplinary knowledge; new procedures	Transformation of complex contexts; strategic review
8	At the border of the field and interdisciplinary articulation	Synthesis/evaluation for critical problems; expanding/redefining knowledge	Authority, innovation and leadership in research

¹Link: <https://europass.europa.eu/es/european-qualifications-framework-efq>

It is worth noting that, within the context of this table, EQF level 5 is equivalent in Spain to Higher Level Vocational Training Cycles (CFGs), which prepare students for higher levels; while levels 6 to 8 progress towards research teaching and scientific specialization. This framework facilitates the comparison of educational and training systems in Europe, promoting labor and academic mobility.

In this context, four key associated terms are defined, and we believe it is relevant to highlight the meaning used to describe the teaching programs at these levels: higher education; university teaching (teaching profiles); professional and specialist (technicians, executives, theorists and project managers); research activity, the basis for progression towards doctoral research.

Higher Education. This refers to formal education that provides students with advanced, detailed, and critical knowledge of a field of study or work, including an understanding of its boundaries. It involves skills for solving complex and unpredictable problems in specialized contexts, managing changing situations, and assuming responsibility for managing professional or academic activities with relative autonomy.

University Teaching. This refers to expert pedagogical practice in university settings, where the professor possesses advanced knowledge to coordinate complex teaching processes, adapt methods to varying contexts, and supervise the work of others. It combines disciplinary mastery with the ability to make autonomous pedagogical decisions and collaborate in interdisciplinary teams.

Professionals and specialists. This defines the level of professional knowledge acquired through work experience. It distinguishes and categorizes advanced knowledge for managing technical activities or projects in unpredictable environments. It includes sub-profiles such as technician (specialized application), executive (decision-making coordination), theorist (conceptual foundation), and project manager (resource integration), all characterized by the autonomous resolution of non-routine problems and accountability for results.

These terms represent advanced but applied competencies, laying the foundation for progression to higher levels to integrate knowledge into research activity. At EQF Level 6, corresponding to university degrees or equivalent, these profiles consolidate the integration of theoretical and practical knowledge, with an emphasis on relative autonomy and the resolution of complex problems.

Higher education fosters the critical understanding of theories; university teaching, the expert management of learning; and the specialist professional, the optimization of processes in real contexts.

The programs called "professional masters" at EQF level 5 in Spain are equivalent to Higher Level Vocational Training Cycles (CFGS) [*this does not prevent them from being recognized in other countries*] [EQF Level 5] — they impart comprehensive and specialized knowledge, oriented towards abstract problems and professional supervision. In Spain, they are regulated by [Royal Decree 659/2023](#) .

Table 2. Comparison between EQF levels

EQF level	Defined Terms/Profiles	Knowledge	Teaching/Professional	Scientific Value
5 (CFGS)	Master's degrees Professionals. Continuing Education Equivalents	Specialized and applied	Practical management and supervision	Preparatory and Instrumental
6	Higher Education; University Teaching; Specialist Professor	Advanced and critical	Expert adaptation and coordination	Indirect application
7	Research Bridge	Highly specialized	Pedagogical innovation	Incipient originality
8	Research Frontier	Cutting-edge	Integrated with research	Unprecedented generation and leadership

To conclude this report, we mention that Table 2 provides a comparison between the EQF levels, terms and definitions used to determine the training program; the knowledge it provides; the profile of the teacher/professional who teaches it and the scientific value it provides for developing a specific research activity.

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