



**World  
Physiotherapy**  
Europe region

## **Statement on Physiotherapy Education of the Europe region**

**Education Matters Working Group (EMWG)**

**APPROVED**

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**STATEMENT ON PHYSIOTHERAPY EDUCATION OF THE EUROPE REGION**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Purpose of the Education Statement

The purpose of this statement is to provide information to physiotherapists, educators and the appropriate authorities and organisations within the Europe region on the principles that underpin physiotherapy education, and to supply the European perspective and context in addition to the World Physiotherapy policy statement on Education (2019, a) and Physiotherapist education framework of World Physiotherapy (World Physiotherapy, 2021).

This statement covers entry level education (bachelor degree EQF6<sup>1</sup>), advanced level education (master degree, EQF7) and PhD level (EQF8) as well as the continuum of continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities. The document should inform planning and long term thinking about the educational needs of the autonomous profession of physiotherapy in relation to other healthcare providers. The statement aims to provide confidence to the public and to public bodies and the wider higher education sectors, promoting physiotherapy education's international standing in Europe.

### 1.2. Higher physiotherapy education in Europe

The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) is a unique international collaboration on higher education and the result of the political will of 49 countries with different political, cultural and academic traditions, which, step by step during the last twenty years, built an area implementing a common set of commitments: structural reforms and shared tools. The EHEA reform has provided a framework to facilitate student and staff mobility, to make higher education more inclusive and accessible, and to make higher education in Europe more attractive and competitive worldwide.

The Bologna Declaration, which contained the fundamental principles of developing a EHEA, was signed in 1999 by 29 European countries out of the 48 countries participating today. Bologna reform is key to building the necessary trust for successful learning mobility, cross-border academic co-operation and the mutual recognition of study periods and qualifications earned abroad. Enhancing the quality and relevance of learning and teaching is also a core mission of the Bologna Process. Latterly, in 2001 the Declaration of Praga, the definition of lifelong learning is included, which is an essential element to achieve greater European competitiveness, improve professional performance and adapt to the social changes that are taking place.

The EU's Growth Strategy 2020 highlights higher education as a key policy area where collaboration between Member States and the EU can deliver positive results for a global knowledge economy. Higher education, with its links to research and innovation, plays a crucial

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<sup>1</sup> The European Qualification Framework (EQF) relates different countries' national qualifications systems to a common European reference framework aiming to better understand and compare qualifications levels of different countries and different education and training systems. The core of the EQF include eight reference levels describing what a learner knows, understands and is able to do – concerning the 'learning outcomes'. Levels of national qualifications will be placed at one of the central reference levels, ranging from basic (Level 1) to advanced (Level 8).

role in personal development and economic growth, providing competent and highly qualified professionals who contribute to developing prosperity and sustainability. This implies both educational and societal responsibilities. Globalisation has resulted in an increasingly international working life, which also requires higher qualifications of the professionals (European Commission 2013).

The European Research Area (ERA) aims to strengthen its scientific and technological bases by international exchange in which researchers, knowledge and technology circulate freely in order to improve competence utilisation. ERA was launched in 2000 and a process to revitalise it began in 2018. According to the new ERA based on excellence, it will strengthen mobility of researchers and the flow of knowledge exchange investing in research and innovation, promote gender equality and diversity in science and enhance co-operation among universities, business and other research and innovation centres (ERA progress Report, 2018).

Physiotherapy education must be informed by research. Both teachers and students should actively be involved in research. A prerequisite for success is that researchers and lecturers in physiotherapy actively take part in undertaking research projects. The Europe region briefing paper (Europe region, World Physiotherapy 2018, a) "*Promoting Research in Physiotherapy in the Europe region - Briefing Paper*" provides a description and analysis of the situation, policy dimensions and implications, and includes suggested recommendations for action concerning physiotherapy research and it is therefore also important to implement research across the spectrum of education and clinical practice.

## 2. VISION FOR THE PHYSIOTHERAPY EDUCATION OF THE EUROPE REGION

The vision of the Europe region is excellence of entry level and post-graduating physiotherapy education across Europe, which is internationally recognised and based on a common consensus among educators, students, employers, public opinion, other health professions and stakeholders. The education needs to meet the future societal needs for physiotherapy in order to improve health, functional ability and quality of life of the population. High quality educational programmes prepare physiotherapists to be autonomous and innovative players in the health care system, taking a lead in interprofessional collaboration; these programmes will enhance free movement and the right of establishment of physiotherapists across Europe.

This document is aligned with the Europe region's Strategic plan (2022-2026) and relates to the purpose "Leading, promoting and representing physiotherapy in the Europe region by driving excellence in education, practice and research, advocating and influence health policy" and the following two strategic objectives:

- (SO2) Physiotherapists are recognised as autonomous professionals
- (SO3) Promote excellence in physiotherapy education, practice and research

The physiotherapy education policy statement emphasises the following main expectations described in chapter 4:

1. Provide underpinning knowledge skills and rationale for clinical reasoning that lead to competencies for delivering high quality innovative physiotherapy services.

2. Be evidence based and include physiotherapy led research as well as inter-professional research activities.
3. Be of high quality and enable flexible ways to enter qualifying and post qualifying physiotherapy education in addition to multiple career pathways and continuous professional development (CPD).
4. Use established national and European quality assurance procedures and standards.
5. Have an international profile.

### 3. PHYSIOTHERAPY ENTRY-LEVEL AND POST-QUALIFYING EDUCATION

The first professional qualification should be the completion of a physiotherapy curriculum that qualifies the physiotherapist for practice as an independent autonomous professional. Education for entry level physiotherapists should be to complete a university level education programme, which is recognised to be at an academic standard of at least Bachelor's level (World Physiotherapy, 2019). Physiotherapy education comprises entry level education (minimum bachelor, EQF6<sup>1</sup>) and advanced level education (master, EQF7) and doctorate level (EQF8).

Qualifying physiotherapy programmes should aim to develop the knowledge, skills, behaviours and values required to practise physiotherapy on graduation, while nurturing the skills, behaviours and values that will enhance career-long development and practice (World Physiotherapy, 2019). Continuing professional development is the career-long learning that physiotherapists engage in, in the context of their working lives to also function as educators (with patients, peers, students and colleagues and so on). Keeping up to date with changes in practice requires individuals to learn and develop constantly to deliver high-quality evidence-based services to their patients/clients. CPD describes the systematic, planned and on-going process of learning that underpins professional practice. CPD enables physiotherapists that have completed an entry level programme to maintain, develop and enhance their personal and professional skills, knowledge and behaviours, and on-going competence to practise (Europe Region, World Physiotherapy 2016). The role of both qualifying and post-qualifying education is to help learners to synthesise evidenced-based practice (EBP) along with a patient-centred approach within a clinical reasoning framework. This, in turn, advances physiotherapy practice, service delivery and ultimately outcomes for patients/clients. All physiotherapists should participate in learning activities that maintain or increase their professional competence.

CPD activities for physiotherapists should meet the minimal standards of quality as set out in the World Physiotherapy guideline for delivering quality continuing professional development for physiotherapists ( World Physiotherapy 2011, a). CPD should be compulsory and implies that physiotherapists at least have to keep up with current developments in the profession. An important part of CPD is specialisation, as well as broadening of practice to meet changing patient and service needs, including managing complex and unpredictable situations. Masters programmes with different specialised clinical content provide new opportunities for expanded knowledge and career possibilities for specialists/ Advanced practice in physiotherapy (Europe region, World Physiotherapy 2008, Europe region, World Physiotherapy 2010, Europe region, World Physiotherapy 2018, b). The demands for specialisation and/or advanced practice vary in the different European countries, some being more directly under legalisation

#### 4. QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The World Physiotherapy (2011, b) supports national member organisations to develop accreditation/recognition processes that independently validate and assess the standards of entry level education provision to ensure a standard that affords graduates full statutory and professional recognition to practise. In Europe, there is often an authority with legislative responsibility for these processes. The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG), in the European Higher Education Area adopted in 2005, aim to develop comparable criteria and methodologies as well as to promote mutual trust while respecting diverse national and institutional contexts and subject areas. In 2015 ESG has been amended and states that the ESG are a set of standards and guidelines for internal and external quality assurance in higher education. The ESG are not standards for quality, nor do they prescribe how the quality assurance processes are implemented, but they provide guidance, covering the areas which are vital for successful quality provision and learning environments in higher education. The ESG should be considered in a broader context that also includes qualifications frameworks, ECTS and diploma supplement that also contribute to promoting the transparency and mutual trust in higher education in the EHEA.

In 2008, the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) was established. Quality Assurance (QA) covers both internal and external systems and was developed to move towards greater internationalisation. The physiotherapy education QA procedures should aim to achieve a balance between accountability and improvement. The Member Organisations of the Europe region have an important role to contribute and support the development of the physiotherapy education in the HEI's through their quality enhancement activities.

Quality is an important dimension in EU policy formation. An important aspect for establishing a knowledge society is the need to coordinate policies across different areas, linking higher education with research and innovation (Elken & Stensaker 2011).

<https://www.enic-naric.net/higher-education-institution.aspx>

#### 5. EDUCATION POLICY STATEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

It is important to recognise that physiotherapy practice and education within Europe are at different stages of development. The Europe Education statement recognises, and values bespoke professional bodies' approaches and their responsiveness to national needs. The education policy statement still recommends physiotherapy education programmes in the Europe region to include the following overall claims presented in the following table:

1. Provide underpinning knowledge skills and rationale for clinical reasoning that lead to competencies for delivering high quality innovative physiotherapy services	2. Be evidence based and include physiotherapy led research as well as multi-professional research activities	3. Be of high quality and enable flexible ways to enter qualifying and post qualifying education in addition to multiple career pathways and continuous professional development (CPD)	4. Physiotherapy education uses established national and European quality assurance procedures and standards	5. Physiotherapy education has an International profile
The curriculum for physiotherapy education reflects national as well as global health and social priorities and include a perspective of sustainable development	Physiotherapy education is built on evidence based physiotherapy practice and research to demonstrate innovation and provide continuous improvement. EBP is integrated in all educational processes at all levels of physiotherapy education.	Physiotherapy education access is based on university level requirements and bachelor degree is a minimum entry qualification to the profession.	HEIs have regular involvement with professional bodies, employers, health authorities and other national and international stakeholders with regard to education.	HEIs facilitate teacher, researcher and student mobility. To enable this ECTS learning agreements are adopted and the curriculum for physiotherapy education defines transparent and comparable competencies.
Qualified physiotherapists have the generic as well as physiotherapy specific competencies including social skills to meet local as well as global population needs.	The education demonstrates clinical value, benefit and cost effectiveness.	Physiotherapy education is structured according to the EQF standard placed within national qualifications framework and aligned with international qualification frameworks.	Quality assurance procedures include all relevant stakeholders; colleagues, student representatives, health and patient organisations.	International mobility aims to promote European joint curricula and joint degrees, to facilitate knowledge and professional development and competitiveness of both the profession and the EU.

<p>The curriculum for physiotherapy education responds to various health care needs within health promotion, prevention, rehabilitation and treatment of disorders.</p> <p>The education includes the competencies needed in an autonomous physiotherapy practice to examine, diagnose, treat and evaluate effects of physiotherapy.</p>	<p>The study culture and learning environments facilitate entrepreneurship and innovations.</p>	<p>All levels of education apply the ECTS in terms of level, quality, workload, learning outcomes, profile of the studies and diploma supplement.</p> <p>The programme demonstrates flexibility in structure and delivery pattern to provide equality of access to individuals from a variety of social and academic backgrounds.</p>	<p>Member Organisations collaborate with public quality assurance authorities, HEIs and quality assurance agencies to develop common quality assurance criteria and methods at national and international level to stimulate an exchange of information.</p>	<p>HEIs promote procedures in transnational education through European and other international networks<sup>2</sup> and organisations as well as trade union agreements.</p>
<p>Qualified physiotherapists have competencies for development and management of services in both the public and in the private sector.</p>	<p>The academic staff has a minimum of a master degree or PhD degree, significant clinical experience and teaching qualifications.</p>	<p>HEIs validate and recognise prior formal, non-formal and informal knowledge in a transparent way to enable access to programmes and provide flexible and effective study pathways.</p>	<p>Quality assurance mechanisms in the HEIs ensure that evaluation procedures consider the links between teaching and learning, research, knowledge transfer and other dimensions of institutional management. These processes ensure their relevance to professional practice and social impact.</p>	<p>HEIs are actively taking part in international research networks to make it possible to use research funding to promote a strong knowledge development.</p>

<sup>2</sup> Such as the ENIC (European Network of Information Centres), the NARIC networks (National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union) and ERASMUS



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