

**European Association for Behaviour Analysis Verified Programmes (EABA-VP)**



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The purpose of this document is two-fold:

- First, it provides brief background information concerning the establishment and development of the field of behaviour analysis, serving to explain the need for professional recognition for behaviour analysts in Europe.
- Second, it provides a guide for course developers at Higher Education Institutions (HEI) in Europe and further afield who aim to train European Behaviour Analysts at Master's level (EuroBA-M). This document outlines the requirements for Masters courses to become EABA verified programmes (EABA-VP).

In order to understand this document in the context of the European Qualification Framework (EQF, 2020), it should be read and used in conjunction with the document IO1: *Standardisation of EuroBA Competences referenced to EQF*. The competences required to become a European Behaviour Analysts at Master's level (EuroBA-M) are available in the EuroBA-M competences document.

### **The need for professional recognition of behaviour analysts**

The aim of Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) is to employ the principles derived from the science of behaviour analysis to facilitate well-being and quality of life for individuals. It does this by addressing socially important behaviours in a variety of contexts, including environmental sustainability, workplace safety, drug abuse, education, sports, dementia care, social justice, and health and wellness (Heward et al., 2022). One area in which the field has made particularly significant contributions in both research and practice is in developing and evaluating supports and interventions involving persons on the autism spectrum/autistic persons (APBA, 2016).

The roots of the science and practice of behaviour analysis are well over 100 years old and have their basis in both the psychology of learning and pragmatism (Skinner, 1953). In the 1960's, the civil rights and disability rights movements in the USA and other countries generated an impetus on the closing of institutions for persons classified as being "mentally and physically disabled" (Governors Council on Developmental Disabilities, 2022). Baer et al. (1968, 1987) delineated what would become the "first formal definition of applied behavior analysis" (Heward et al., 2022, p. 328) highlighting the importance of addressing socially significant behaviours in natural environments, thereby combining the natural science paradigm with humanism. Indeed, a number of ground-breaking studies were conducted during this period improving quality of life of young children with autism. Clinical applications of the scientific discoveries in behaviour analysis led to remarkable improvements in the lives of these persons, teaching them independent living skills that led to participation in community activities, obtaining work, and more generally, increasing their quality of life (Green, 2019; Johnston, 2018; Larsson, 2013). This led to a flourishing field of ABA-based practice.

The rapidly growing need for professionals trained in the science and application of behaviour analysis meant that large numbers of professionals had to be trained quickly; however, this did not come without a cost (Garner et al., 2022). One of the challenges with the increased demand for ABA-based services was the short supply of well-trained staff (Dillenburger et al., 2016). Consequently, persons with inadequate and very little training in ABA who were lacking knowledge, skills, experience, and competence in the science and who were not bound by well-defined professional ethical obligations, obtained employment in private practices as well as state institutions. Not surprisingly, poorly implemented behavioural procedures led to accusations of unprofessional conduct which was justifiably criticized (Leaf et al., 2021). If not thoroughly addressed, there was a potential risk of jeopardising the application of the entire science of behaviour analysis (Keenan & Dillenburger, 2020; Leaf et al., 2021; Morris, 2009) at huge cost to those who most needed support (National Council for Severe Autism, 2022; Skolnik, 2022).

The need for professional regulation is clear. The profession of behaviour analyst started in the early 1970s in North America (Carr, 2011). However, it is not formally recognised in the European Union (EU) (E. J. Arntzen et al., 2009; Hughes & Shook, 2007). For behaviour analysts to be able to practice within the EU with the expectations surrounding knowledge, skills, and autonomy and responsibilities, it is necessary to create a clear range of competences for the profession. Consequently, the European Association for Behaviour Analysis (EABA) has decided to adapt and adopt the framework developed by the European Behaviour Analyst (EuroBA) project.

The EuroBA project was the result of cooperation between international behaviour analysts from the United Kingdom, Czech Republic, Netherlands, Greece, Sweden, and Italy. The project benefitted from a Professional Advisory Group (PAG) that included a further 16 European countries to ensure that the standards and competences developed in the project are acceptable to as many European countries as possible (Keenan et al., 2023).

The overall objectives of the project were to facilitate transparency and recognition of qualifications for behaviour analysts in Europe. The project had 6 Intellectual Outputs (IO).

1. IO1 covers professional standards referenced to European Qualifications Framework (EQF).
2. IO2 outlines the development of the behaviour analyst qualification in the context of the six partner National Qualifications Frameworks (NQF).
3. IO3 provides a detailed glossary of terms in partner languages.
4. IO4 outlines a competency framework for entry-level EuroBA-Technicians (EuroBA-T).
5. IO5 is a competency framework for Master's-level EuroBA (EuroBA-M).
6. IO6 is an online entry-level multimedia course in six partner languages.

EABA adapted the Intellectual Outputs of this project and offers two areas of support:

- First, in order to support of countries applying for professional recognition within their jurisdiction, a number of key documents have been uploaded on the EABA website that can be used free of charge and, if necessary, translated into local languages;
- Second, Masters level university programmes that aim to train behaviour analysts can apply to become EABA Verified Programmes (EABA-VP). The present document is adapted from IO5 to outline and guide the development of EABA-VPs.

### **Development of behaviour analysis within Europe**

In comparison to the USA, the understanding and recognition of the science and practice of behaviour analysis across Europe and the rest of the world has spread much more slowly. In broad terms, and probably due at least in part to the lack of language barriers, the interest of the field spread from the USA in the 1960's -1970s, initially to the UK ((Arntzen et al., 2009; Arntzen & Pellón, 2021; Keenan, 2014; Kelly et al., 2018).

Since the 1990's, there has been an unprecedented growth and demand for behaviour analytic interventions primarily through parental advocacy supported by professionals and academics who are aware of the extensive evidence base demonstrating unique developmental, learning, and participatory milestones noted among autistic children who had received behaviour analytic early interventions compared to those who received traditional special education. This led to the demand for ABA services and the development of university courses aligned with criteria concerning content, competence of instructors, and ethical guidelines developed by the Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB, 2025) and the Association for Behavior Analysis-International (ABAI, 2020).

The first European ABA course sequence was set up in 2001 by a co-operative of UK and Irish behaviour analysts (Hughes & Shook, 2007). The first University-based masters level course sequence meeting BACB criteria was approved in 2003 at Bangor University in Wales. By 2007, there were 16 institutes of higher education in 11 countries with approved masters level course sequences and by 2018, there were 34 approved VCS in 19 countries across Europe (Martin & Carr, 2020), there were 58 institutes of higher education in 16 countries within the European area that had masters level VCSs verified by the Association for Behavior Analysis International (ABAI), with some countries having doctoral programs specifically focused on behaviour analysis. These developments clearly demonstrate the need for professional recognition and regulation of behaviour analysis as a profession in its own right within Europe and the European Higher Education Area. However, when the BACB withdrew from international certification (BACB, 2019), the number of these courses reduced dramatically (Keenan et al., 2023; Kelly et al., 2018).

## Ongoing developments in behaviour analysis

While university courses in Europe that are ABAI verified have reduced significantly, there are a number of professional and academic organisations that promote behaviour analysis (Keenan et al., 2023). Apart from national organisations, there are two main pan-European organisations.

- The ***Experimental Analysis of Behaviour Group (EABG)*** was founded 1963 in the UK. This group arranges high-quality conferences taking place in London bi-annually, attracting European and international attendees.
- The ***European Association for Behaviour Analysis (EABA)*** was formally established in 2001 and arranges behaviour analytic conferences, summer schools, and generally supports behaviour analysts across Europe. Included in EABA membership is the subscription to the *European Journal of Behavior Analysis (EJOBA)*, a peer-review journal managed by the Norwegian Association of Behavior Analysis (NAFO) published by Francis & Taylor.

As with other sciences, behaviour analysis develops and evolves constantly as a result of research as well as changing societal and cultural requirements. For example, Covid-19, migration, war, and refugees have required a shift in focus on telehealth (Craig et al., 2021; Dounavi et al., 2021; Kingsdorf & Pančocha, 2021) as well as trauma-informed care (Dillenburger, 1996; Fargas-Malet & Dillenburger, 2016; Kubina et al., 2000). Flexibility in terms of practice, safety, and consent and trust are paramount for behaviour analysts and promote choice, shared governance, and skill building.

The high demand in Europe for competent behaviour analysts requires Higher Education Institutes (HEI) to develop verified Masters-level programmes, that keep abreast of the needs of the populations graduates are going to serve. This requires that behaviour analytic competences and qualifications are of the highest standard and transferable across Europe and further afield. The EABA therefore developed a system to verify programmes that meet minimum standards.

Ultimately, this process supports professional development, recognition, and regulation across Europe. Given that **it is legally impossible for professional certification to be afforded by an agency or body that is located outside of the jurisdiction in which the professional recognition applies**, full professional recognition and regulation of behaviour analysts can only be achieved via authorised national procedures that differ in each country. In other words, professional regulation is possible only through the country-specific authorised professional accreditation system in each jurisdiction.

Once a country has officially recognised a profession, mutual mobility agreements can be negotiated across the European Union (EU), as is the case, for example, for a range of medical professionals as well as pharmacists, veterinary surgeons and architects. The

recognition of professional qualifications laid down in Directive 2005/36/EC enables the free movement of these professionals within the EU (European Commission, 2022).

The long-term goal of the EABA-VP initiative is that agreed minimum training requirements enable behaviour analysts to be added to this list of recognised professional qualifications across Europe as European.

### **Guiding principles and alignment of EABA-VP**

The coursework delivered in an EABA-VP is taught by a program director and course instructors with appropriate academic backgrounds in behaviour analysis. The course director should be employed by the university where the course is based. The competences to be taught were developed in collaboration with 22 countries who were part of the Professional Advisory Group (PAG) (Keenan et al., 2023). Note that these competences were modelled on the BACB 4<sup>th</sup> Edition Task list<sup>1</sup>. The EABA-VP level equates to Level 7 of the European Qualification Framework (EQF, 2020). The EQF defines core areas of knowledge, skills, and responsibility and autonomy for European professionals.

The EABA-VP competence list deliberately does not prescribe individual learning outcomes to allow course developers to adapt their courses to their local, structural, and cultural diversity. Course developers can use the competence descriptors as guides to develop specific learning outcomes that indicate how they intend to ensure that their students meet the competences. This approach is expected to enhance cultural sensitivity of the courses and promote staff mobility across Europe. Behaviour analytic definitions are provided in the Glossary (IO3).

The competence profile to be taught at EABA-VPs covers basic behaviour-analytic knowledge and skills that include measurement, experimental design, behaviour change methods, and fundamental elements of behaviour change, systems, assessments, implementation, management and supervision, philosophical, conceptual, and ethical issues. Client-centered competences and responsibilities, include skills such as ensuring social validity, cultural sensitivity and, when appropriate, cultural adaptations. The importance of knowledge-based competences covering concepts and principles understood by ethically competent behaviour analysts cannot be overstated. These areas are targeted to ensure that behaviour analysts are clear about their scope of practice and to build their personal scope of competence, and as such, be able to contribute to the overall objectives of the United Nations Convention for Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006) and related European and international disability rights action plans (EQF, 2020).

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<sup>1</sup> Dr Neil Martin, Behavior Analyst Certification Board, confirmed that there are no copyright issues

The competence profile to be taught at EABA-VPs lays the foundation for Higher Education Institutions to develop more Master courses in behaviour analysis across Europe (Roll-Pettersson et al., 2010, 2020a, 2020b). These courses should be aligned to local National Qualifications Frameworks and the EQF. They should target students from many backgrounds and disciplines, such as psychologists, speech and language therapists, special educators, to become qualified as behaviour analysts.

### **Guide for course developers at Higher Education Institutions**

EABA-VPs will be delivered through universities. These courses should sufficiently prepare students for pursuing a subsequent practitioner or academic career in behaviour analysis. The competences are defined as learning outcomes to be achieved through theoretical training and supervised practice and assessed through a variety of assessment formats, e.g., case studies, reports, written exams (essay questions and/or multiple choice), oral presentations, and thesis.

Course developers, leaders, and teachers of EABA-VPs should be qualified behaviour analysts themselves, trained in ABA to Master's or Doctoral level and employed by the institutions that deliver the courses. The EABA-VP coursework should include sufficient hours of face-to-face teaching time (e.g., on-campus, hybrid, or online) and sufficient practical experience under behaviour analytic supervision.

### **EABA-VP Competences**

The EABA-VP competences should be considered basic standards of academic training for professionals who supervise, develop and/or deliver direct behaviour analytic services, irrespective of the area of practice (e.g., education/schools, intellectual disabilities, autism, community work, social care, organisations) and irrespective of the age group of service users (e.g., children, youth, or adults) or their ethnicity, religious, or cultural background. The knowledge, skills, and responsibility and autonomy learning outcomes provide a basis for the recognition of the profession of "Behaviour Analysts" within Europe, thereby promoting mobility between countries, consumer protection, and basic pre-requisite for ethical and professional conduct among practitioners and researchers.

It is important to note that the EABA-VP competences do not represent a stand-alone professional certification, credentialing, or accreditation. They provide core content guidelines for postgraduate training programs in behaviour analysis in the European context, embedded within the EQF. They also are to be used to support those who aim to achieve professional credentialing in their own country.

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