NQF state of play

Poland 2020

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Overview

Stage of development: $\boxed{\text{Operational stage}}$

NQF linked to EQF: ✓

Scope of the framework:
Comprehensive NQF including all levels and types of qualification from formal education and training. Open to regulated and non-statutory qualifications awarded outside formal education and training.

Number of levels:
Eight

Legal basis/stage of development:
Law on the integrated qualifications system (2015) (in Polish)

NQF/EQF website:
⧉ Website

Qualifications register/database:
⧉ Integrated qualifications register

Introduction and context

Poland performs well on most EU key indicators. Very few students leave education and training early (5.2% in 2019, compared to the EU average of 10.2%), and the high rate of participation in school is paralleled by a high rate of tertiary education attainment (46.6% in 2019, compared to the EU average of 40.3%). According to the 2018 Programme for international student assessment (PISA), Poland has reached the EU benchmark 2020 in reading, mathematics and science, with fewer than 15% underachievers in all three fields. The employment rate of recent graduates at 84% in 2019 is well above the EU average of 80.9%. Among areas for improvement are participation in early childhood education and care (93.0% in 2019, compared to the EU average of 94.8%), and participation of adults in lifelong learning at 4.8% in 2019; it is far below the EU average of 10.8%. Although the education system gradually opens up to non-formal adult education and informal learning, the results remain week.

At policy-making level, the priority is to develop the implementation models for the Integrated skills strategy 2030 ([1]). The implementation of the VET reform since 2016 continues. In February 2019, a new regulation was adopted defining core curricula for all occupations in a new classification, including vocational skills for selected occupations. In 2019, the Ministry of National Education published the first forecast of demand for employees in vocational occupations. In 2020, local governments will receive increased State subsidies for VET learners in high-demand occupations identified in the forecast. Higher education institutions are implementing the latest reform aimed at improving quality provided for in the Act on Higher Education adopted in July 2018. 2019/20 was the first full year of implementation of the reform. Higher education institutions are putting in place new statutes, reorganising their staff and setting up scientific councils (European Commission, 2020).

Poland has developed a comprehensive national qualifications framework, the Polish qualifications framework (PQF), which was formally adopted through the Act on the Integrated Qualifications System, which entered into force in January 2016 ([2]). It is part of the integrated qualifications system (IQS), together with the integrated qualifications register (IQR) ([3]), and arrangements for quality assurance and validation of non-formal and informal learning. The integration and

combined use of several instruments for reform in a wider policy strategy, with the overall shift to learning outcomes at its core and addressing all levels and subsystems of education and training, is one of the marks of the Polish approach. The PQF is an important tool for increasing transparency and consistency of education and training and the wider qualification system, including qualifications awarded outside education and training system. Beyond its role in describing existing qualifications, it has contributed to the redesign of programmes, standards and curricula, and is embedded in legislation that regulates formal learning.

In 2017 the government adapted the Strategy for responsible development 2020 (with a perspective to 2030) ([4]). This strategy includes further development of the IQS as a strategic project. It also resulted in the need to verify and update the integrated development strategies binding at that time, including the Human capital development strategy 2030 ([5]), which explicitly mentions strategic projects aimed at further development and implementation of the IQS, based on the PQF. The IQS and issues related to lifelong learning, including improving the competences and qualifications of adults, are also included in the Integrated skills strategy 2030, which is to integrate national strategic documents, including the Strategy for responsible development and others. The Council of Ministers, on January 25, 2019, adopted a resolution approving the general part of the Integrated skill strategy 2030 and on December 28, 2020, the adoption of the detailed part followed. The strategy states that the IQS is one of the tools of the State's policy for skills development. It also foresees further development of validation arrangements and vocational guidance for improved accessibility of high-quality qualifications. Ministers managing government administration departments, supported by opinions from industry stakeholders, under the IQS Act, decide on the inclusion of market ([6]) and regulated qualifications, awarded outside the formal education and training system, to the national qualifications system, creating a sector policy on skills and qualifications. Development and renewal of qualifications in different sectors of the economy shall be consistent with the objectives and assumptions of the Integrated skills strategy. The Ministry of National Education was responsible for preparing the adopted strategy ([7]). The IQS Act and the related legislation was amended in a number of instances and can be found at the designated webpage ([8]) (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

The PQF was referenced to the European qualifications framework (EQF) in May 2013 (Educational Research Institute, 2013).

Policy objectives

Work on the qualifications framework is an integral part of broad reform and modernisation of the Polish qualifications system, addressing all levels and all subsystems of education and training. An important part of this reform has been an overall shift to learning outcomes ([9]). This required redesign of all programmes, standards and curricula in general, vocational and higher education and training. The framework, through its focus on learning outcomes, is seen as an important instrument for strengthening the transparency and overall consistency of education and training.

The original purpose of the PQF has not changed since its creation (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020):

    a. to help integrate the various qualifications subsystems in Poland;
    b. to increase the accessibility to and quality of qualifications;
    c. to implement more effectively the policy for lifelong learning;
    d. to fulfil the Council recommendation on the EQF for lifelong learning;
    e. to fit into the wider context of developments in qualifications systems in Europe.

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

The PQF has eight learning outcomes-based levels, covering all types of qualifications. The IQS Act establishes the typology of qualifications, the principles of inclusion of qualifications in the IQR, and principles of quality assurance. Three types of qualification can be assigned a PQF level and included in the IQS, classified according to whether they refer to a level of formal education or not, and according to the legal basis that governs the process of awarding the qualification:

a. type A: State-regulated qualifications within the formal education and training system (general education, VET and higher education);
b. type B: State-regulated qualifications outside the formal education and training system;
c. type C: non-regulated qualifications from the private sector provided they meet agreed quality criteria (market qualifications).

One important aim of the IQS is to extend systemic solutions for quality assurance to all qualifications listed in the IQR. Such qualifications must now comply with uniform quality assurance requirements, consistent with European guidelines and standards. In the case of qualifications awarded in the formal education system (general, VET, higher education), quality assurance is ensured by relevant existing institutions functioning according to European standards and recommendations. In the case of market and State-regulated qualifications awarded outside the formal education and training, all awarding bodies (certifying institutions) must have a system of internal quality assurance and also be included in an external quality assurance system. External quality assurance is provided by an external quality assurance institution selected by the relevant minister from a list of entities administered by the minister coordinator (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

A distinction is made between full and partial qualifications, included in the PQF; full qualifications are awarded exclusively within the formal system, where partial qualifications can also be awarded. All non-formal qualifications (both regulated and non-regulated) are considered partial qualifications.

At a very early stage of PLQ planning, a seven-level framework was

envisaged, closely matching existing qualifications and degrees in the Polish system. It was later decided to introduce a new level 5 in the framework, to allow for a more appropriate placing of short-cycle HE qualifications as well as advanced vocational qualifications, such as technicians in selected technology-intensive professions (currently 29) or the master craftsperson qualifications (*Meister*).

Levelling of some of the master craftsperson qualifications was accompanied by vivid discussion on whether to place them at PQF level 4 or 5. The debate focused on how much weight should be given to learning outcomes associated with autonomy in running a business, leadership skills and tutoring skills required to become a master craftsperson, in comparison to 'typical' vocational learning outcomes. The decisions by a team of experts, based on comparison of learning outcomes with PQF descriptors, were taken to place each of the 14 master craftsperson qualifications at PQF level 5. Challenges in terms of levelling have also been encountered with regards to diplomas awarded after postgraduate studies: so far three of these qualifications have been included in the IQS, with others rejected as qualification descriptions were found to be insufficient to allow levelling. Expert support is being provided to higher education institutions to improve qualification descriptions for postgraduate study programmes.

In an effort to connect subsystems of education and training and to facilitate synergistic developments within sectors and sub-sectors, the PQF introduces level descriptors with different degrees of generality and for different purposes:

a. universal descriptors (first stage); these are the most generic and form the basis for the comprehensive PQF;
b. descriptors for the education and training subsystems and sub-frameworks (second stage): general, vocational and higher education, separate descriptors for level 5 qualifications;
c. descriptors for sectoral qualifications frameworks (third stage, not indicated in Figure 1); these are developed with second stage descriptors as a basis.

The basic principles behind the three sets of PQF level descriptors are illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. **Structure of level descriptors in the PQF**
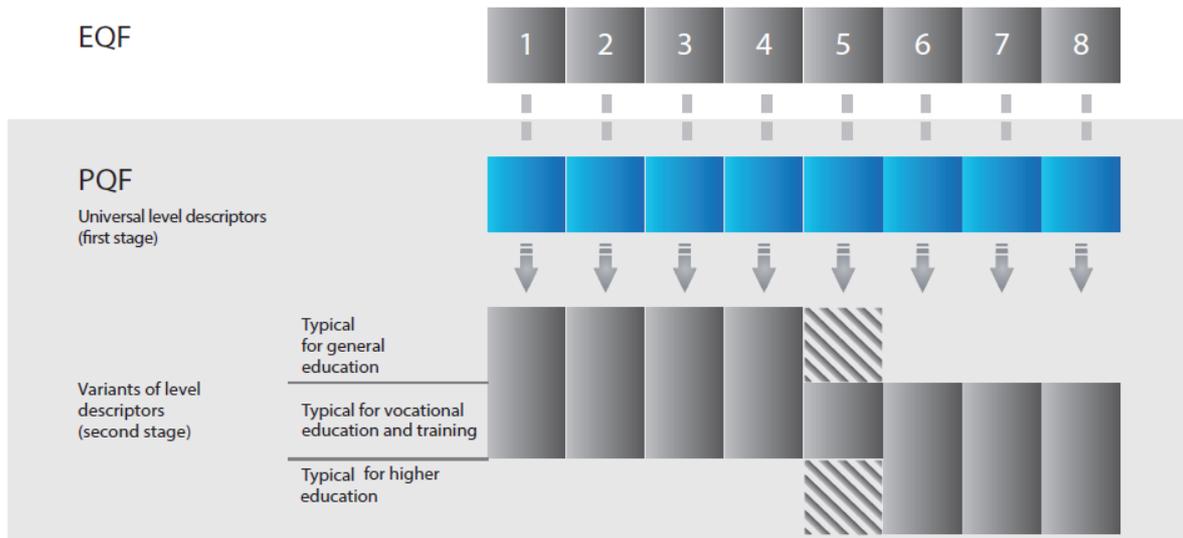
Source: Educational Research Institute, 2017.

The first stage (universal) learning outcomes descriptors developed for the PQF refer to the key learning domains in Figure 2. These descriptors are based on an agreement between stakeholders in general, vocational and higher education and are the common reference point for developments at sub-system (second stage) and for sectors (third stage) levels.

Figure 2. **First stage generic descriptors (universal)**

Knowledge	Scope
	Depth of knowledge
Skills	Problem-solving and applying knowledge in practice
	Learning
	Communication
Social competence	Identity
	Cooperation
	Responsibility

Source: Adapted from Educational Research Institute (2017).

The basic distinction between knowledge, skills and social competence is used, but the degree of specificity differs between subsystems. For

example, the main descriptive categories of the level descriptors for general education and VET are specified as follows:

GENERAL EDUCATION (LEVELS 1 TO 4)   **VET (LEVELS 1 TO 5)**

Knowledge	
a. language and communication b. mathematics and natural sciences c. social functioning	a. theories/principles b. phenomena and processes c. organising work d. tools and materials
Skills	
a. language and communication b. mathematics and natural sciences c. social functioning d. learning	a. information b. organising work c. tools and materials d. learning and professional development
Social competence	
a. language and communication b. health and the environment c. social functioning	a. following rules b. cooperation c. responsibility

While the coexistence of several qualification sub-frameworks is common in most European countries, the PQF takes a step further and attempts to make these explicit within an overarching conceptual approach based on learning outcomes. For instance, the IQS Act brings the requirements for non-formal qualifications in line with those for qualifications from formal general, vocational and higher education by having them based on learning outcomes, setting a standard for the manner of describing qualifications, requiring a process of validation and certification, as well as internal and external quality assurance systems (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020). When, for example, the financial sector was developing a specialised sectoral qualifications framework ([10]), it

used learning outcomes descriptors clearly connected to the level descriptors operating at other levels of generality (including the EQF level descriptors). By moving beyond the general, national level descriptors, the PQF is better able to link to the reform of standards and curriculum development and eventually to learning and assessment.

Progress can be observed in the overall shift to learning outcomes in Polish education and training. Core curricula, formulated in terms of learning outcomes, were introduced for all the main parts of education and training. The core curriculum for general education was gradually implemented from the 2009/10 school year and a revised core curriculum was introduced starting with the 2017/18 school year. The core curriculum for vocational education was used from the 2012/13 school year; a new version, taking into account not only detailed learning outcomes but also the criteria for verifying these outcomes, applies starting with school year 2019/20. In both general education and VET, the core curriculum forms the basis for assessment criteria. Amendments to the Act on Higher Education in 2011 ([11]) defined 'learning outcomes' and required all study programmes and resulting qualifications to be described in terms of learning outcomes as of the 2012/13 academic year, in compliance with the NQF for higher education. Learning outcomes were defined in eight broad areas of study. A 2016 regulation of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education ([12]) replaced the notion of learning outcomes in individual areas with the concept of 'qualification characteristics' or 'descriptions' ([13]) in full accordance with the IQS. These developments were aimed at promoting lifelong learning and recognition of learning acquired outside the formal system (Duda, 2019). To reduce bureaucratic burdens, a new regulation on the characteristics of levels 6 to 8 of the PQF was adopted in 2018 ([14]). This no longer defines specific learning outcomes for the eight broad areas of studies for two reasons: first, because the new Act on Higher Education and Science introduced a new classification for the science and technology field, based largely on the OECD classification ([15]); second, the qualification characteristics are more general and refer to the three levels of the PQF. The only exception is in the arts, where the field is considered specific enough to have its own set of qualification characteristics.

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

Formal adoption of the framework in 2015, with the IQS Act, clarified how the coordination of the qualifications system (including the framework) was to be carried out in the further development and implementation stages. The Ministry of National Education is responsible for overall coordination while the Education Research institute (IBE) ([16]) is responsible for the coordination of works and substantive support in the implementation of the IQS. The IQS Stakeholder Council was set up in September 2016 as an advisory and consultative body to the Ministry of Education and Science. The council consists of representatives of education and training providers, employers, trade unions, associations of higher education institutions, commercial training institutions, local governments, representatives of learners, and the central administration (Ministry of National Education and the Central Examination Board). Its role is to advise on operation, to monitor implementation, and to determine the direction of IQS-related developments, ensuring coherence of the solutions chosen. Its responsibilities include:

a. monitoring the functioning of the IQS and proposing improvements;
b. advising on draft regulations related to the IQS;
c. giving expert opinions on the PQF level for regulated and market qualifications to be included in the IQS;
d. advising on proposals to include sectoral qualifications frameworks in the IQS.

Since October 2016, the Minister of National Education is the EQF NCP.

The inter-ministerial task force for lifelong learning and the integrated qualification system, established in 2010 continue to operate, monitoring IQS implementation at a more strategic level.

The IBE continues to play a key role in the qualifications system and framework, supporting the ministry with technical and organisational solutions and monitoring implementation. The institute has been nominated to support and coordinate the development and inclusion in the IQS of qualifications attained outside formal education. It is also responsible for operating the IQR and for entering the qualifications included in the IQS into the register.

Sectoral skills councils consisting of representatives of employers, employees, and sectoral public institutions have also been established since 2016. They facilitate dialogue between education and the economy, acting as a forum to discuss sector needs and how skills acquired in schools, universities, and training courses respond to the needs of employers. One of the main goals of the sector skills councils is to develop sectoral qualifications frameworks, as an extension of the PQF for specific sectors. As of the end of 2020, there are 16 sectoral qualifications frameworks (SQF) ([17]), all being developed with the support of the IBE. According the definition from the IQS Law, SQF is a description of levels of qualifications functioning in a given sector or branch; levels of sectoral qualifications frameworks refer to appropriate levels of the PQF. Sectors (trade unions, sector organisations) have the opportunity to include SQFs in the IQS. If the SQF is included, it may serve in the process of levelling as a reference. So far, four sectoral qualifications frameworks have been included in the IQS. The decision to link a sectoral qualifications framework to the IQS is made by the minister of national education, at the request of the minister responsible for the sector.

In the process of the design of the SQFs, involvement of various stakeholders is assumed, including education and the labour market as this is a good opportunity for a constructive discussion about the actual needs of a labour markets and future trends. From the perspective of a given sector, the SQF is a reference point and a tool to organise competences and qualifications in the sector.

In Poland, SQF has become a response to the deregulation that has occurred in many sectors. It is also the reference point for analysing the demand and supply of competences and qualifications in a given sector. In 2017-18, SQF pilot tests were carried out in the telecommunications and banking industries as a tool supporting human resources processes in large enterprises. The outcomes of these pilots are regarded as satisfying and indicate that SQF is an important tool supporting the identification and comparison of specialised industry competences (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

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A key element of the IQS is the introduction of a more consistent and quality-assured approach to validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL). Overarching measures were introduced to integrate existing validation arrangements, while specific validation procedures for each education level are adjusted individually. The aim is to increase the flexibility of the education and training system and make it possible to acquire qualifications in different settings and throughout life.

The main driver, common for all sectors, is to improve the response of education to labour market needs, particularly in the context of ever-changing demand for skills. It also aims to empower adults by encouraging them to valorise learning obtained at work and throughout life, an aspect which is particularly important given the relatively low participation in adult learning in Poland. The learning-outcomes-based PQF provides a reference point for this approach, signalling that qualifications at all levels can be acquired not only through formal education and training but also through non-formal and informal learning.

The IQS Act introduced a formal definition of validation, as 'assessing whether a person seeking to have a qualification awarded has attained a distinct part or all of the learning outcomes required for that qualification, regardless of the person's learning path (IQS Act, 2015)' ([19]). Validation in Poland covers all four stages outlined in the 2012 Council recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (identification, documentation, assessment and certification), though certification is treated as a distinct process since separate institutions can be responsible for validation and certification. The IQS Act and its implementing legislation specify relevant matters: the requirements for bodies carrying out validation and certification; the regulations for obtaining the permit to carry out certification; the principles for quality assurance in validation and certification; the scope of information collected in the IQR; procedures for comparing learning outcomes for qualifications with PQF characteristics; and the rules for monitoring processes.

In general education and VET, the possibility of acquiring qualifications

via validation of non-formal and informal learning is guaranteed by law. Since 2012, general education qualifications (confirming primary and upper secondary level, and basic and upper secondary vocational education levels for general education in vocational schools) can be attained on the basis of 'extramural examinations' that can be taken by adults without the obligation to return to school. Both initial and continuous vocational qualifications can be obtained by passing external examinations to validate professional knowledge and skills acquired in the workplace. In higher education there is a possibility of recognition of prior learning as an alternative path to gaining entry to a programme of study or to shorten the time spent studying a programme. Up to 50% of ECTS credits can be gained in this way, following verification of knowledge and skills developed through work experience; there is, however, a limit (20%) to the total number of students in a given programme, level and profile of study that can undergo VNFIL. In both VET and higher education, certain conditions have to be met with regard to the level of education attained and the number of years and the type of professional experience required. There are also conditions that higher education institutions have to meet to be able to carry out validation procedures.

For non-formal qualifications included in the IQS, general arrangements for validation are a mandatory component of the description of each qualification, alongside learning outcomes and verification criteria. Each qualification may be awarded by multiple awarding bodies, which can cooperate with subcontractors organising the identification, documentation and verification stages of validation. The IQS does not impose a single model for carrying out validation to be used across the board: each qualification has its own requirements for validation and each awarding body has certain freedom in deciding on the exact course of the process and in creating its own validation tools (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

Providing guidance is a key aspects of lifelong learning policies. Despite the lack of provisions in the IQS Act directly referring to vocational guidance, other legally regulated solutions already functioning in Poland are intended to help people in identifying and documenting learning outcomes in accordance with the 2012 Council recommendation on validation on non-formal and informal learning. These solutions relate mainly to the labour market and the formal education system. They have a long history and function in different contexts; in consequence, they utilise many different frameworks – such as reference to what is being identified and documented – besides learning outcomes (a relatively new

tool in vocational guidance), and measuring competences, predispositions and motivations. The same applies to diagnostic methods, databases of qualifications/occupations, and the possible results of the guidance process (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Since the adoption of the IQS Act, stakeholders have been supported in developing arrangements for validation by the Ministry of National Education and the Educational Research Institute, mainly via knowledge dissemination and direct cooperation. Between 2015 and 2018, more than 40 institutions were directly supported either at the stage of developing new qualifications or in creating specific procedures for validation. A number of publications and digital tools supporting VNFIL were developed by the Educational Research Institute ([20]) (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

In May 2019 the report *The validation of non-formal and informal learning in Poland – Implementation of the 2012 Council recommendation,* was presented to the EQF Advisory Group. Several national strategies in Poland define lifelong learning, adult education and the validation of non-formal and informal learning as key ingredients for sustainable socioeconomic development. One of the aspects requiring extra attention is the promotion of validation as a process that includes the identification and documentation of learning outcomes as well as assessment, accompanied by specialised guidance that could supplement other forms of support already available to individuals. This is strongly linked to building trust in less conventional validation methods, such as the portfolio. Another challenge that needs to be addressed is to identify the synergy between the vocational guidance offered by schools or public employment services and the IQS (Gmaj, I. et al., 2019). Further development of both validation and vocational guidance is envisaged in Poland's Integrated skills strategy 2030.

NQF implementation and impact

The PQF has reached an operational stage and is well embedded in legislation and related policies. It is a permanent and visible feature of the national education, training and qualifications system, improving transparency by providing a reference point for development and review of standards and curricula as well as providing a platform for cooperation of stakeholders across education, training and employment. It has eight learning-outcomes-based levels applicable to all Polish qualifications, from general education, vocational education and training (VET), higher education, and those outside the formal education and training system (regulated and non-regulated, as long as they meet agreed quality criteria) ([21]). Full and partial qualifications are included ([22]).

Along with the adoption of the framework, the IQS Act established the IQR, coordination of the IQS and the role of stakeholders, a typology of qualifications and the related terminology, principles for quality assurance ([23]) and principles for the inclusion of qualifications (including non-formal qualifications) in the IQS ([24]).

Different elements of the system were implemented gradually. Qualifications in the formal education system were assigned to PQF levels in a first phase, based on learning outcomes that had been already defined and adopted through legislation governing the formal education subsystems. Inclusion of regulated (statutory) and non-statutory (market) qualifications awarded outside the formal education system in the IQR is decided by the competent minister for that qualification; in the latter case this follows a request made by the awarding body. By February 2021, 10 312 qualifications were included in the IQR ([25]), most of which are formal qualifications from general education, VET, and higher education.

The focus in the current phase of implementation is on the development, levelling and inclusion of non-formal qualifications in the IQS. The Educational Research Institute supports this work, in line with the principles that govern all qualifications included in the IQS, and manages projects. According to the implementation schedule of IQS, the goal is to include in the register 200 non-regulated qualifications (market qualifications) by 2023. A mid-term target, to include 40 qualifications by end 2018, has been achieved. As of March 2021, 119 such qualifications have already been included in the register and 217 have been proposed for inclusion; they are at various stages of formal and substantive evaluation (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

PQF levels are indicated in the IQR and on all formal qualifications included; work is in progress to indicate EQF levels as well. Both PQF and EQF levels are indicated on certificates and diplomas in general education, IVET and higher education, as well as Europass certificates and diploma supplements ([26]). PQF and EQF levels are indicated on continuous VET and qualifications awarded outside formal (regulated) education and training certificates, if included in the IQR.

Implementation is supported by a number of projects and studies. In 2019, the final report on the IQS evaluation was completed ([27]), summarising main outcomes with the objective to assess the efficiency and complexity of the process of including market qualifications. The case studies ([28]) had the objective to gain knowledge of the potential of the examined institutions that will play the role of the external quality assurance institution to ensure the quality of the process of awarding qualifications in IQS. The key message from both reports is that procedures for including qualifications in the system need to be made more efficient. They provide evidence for planned changes to IQS Law, mentioned above.

The PQF has been communicated and promoted in Poland as part of, and along with, the entire integrated qualifications system. So far, the communication strategy has focused on disseminating knowledge and building awareness of the IQS, on communicating the benefits for both stakeholders and beneficiaries, and on encouraging potential stakeholders to join in activities to develop the system. Indirectly, it is also aimed at promoting the concept of lifelong learning in the context of the IQS and the PQF: to develop awareness in society of how career pathways can be perceived; of the approach to attaining qualifications, and of expectations about the education system; and to introduce a new language when speaking about qualifications. The main channels for communicating information about the PQF have been the IQS Portal, which was launched together with the integrated qualifications register in July 2016, the website of the EQF NCP ([29]), public relations activities, seminars, conferences, debates, participation in industry events, publications and media materials. The IBE has undertaken and continues to undertake a number of information activities, including consultation seminars addressed to career counsellors working in labour market institutions and those providing advisory services in education. During these seminars, participants learn the assumptions around the implemented solutions, the structure and principles of the IQS functioning, the procedure of including qualifications, and tasks and

functions assigned to individual entities in the system. During the meetings, the detail of the opportunities offered by the IQS to its beneficiaries, the final recipients, are also discussed. There are also materials to support experts and general public interested in IQS: to learn and understand learning outcomes and the main tool of the IQS and PQF. These are the primary source of information for entities applying for the status of a certifying authority or external quality assurance entity. So far, several dozen different guides on the functioning of the IQS have been published ([30]).

Referencing to the EQF

The PQF for lifelong learning was referenced to the EQF in 2013 ([31]). A separate *Self-certification report of the national qualifications framework for higher education* ([32]) to the QF-EHEA was prepared at the same time.

An updated referencing report is expected to be presented in 2022 after planned amendments to the IQS Act are in place to reflect recent modifications of qualification procedures, accreditation of certifying bodies and quality assurance arrangements (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Important lessons and future plans

The implementation of the IQS and PQF is considered one of the key actions of the Polish government in developing policies aimed at increasing the quality of human capital in Poland. After adopting the IQS Act, national authorities wanted to make the system functional as quickly as possible so that qualifications could be included in the IQS and, at the same time, awarding bodies could begin awarding these qualifications.

Implementation of the PQF has been the main mechanism integrating changes introduced in the general, vocational, and higher education sectors. Prior to this, the Polish qualifications system had been centred on standards and criteria addressing the formal education process, defined by content of education and years of formal learning. The progress made in introducing the learning outcomes approach in the different subsystems of education and training provides a good basis for future developments. It also supports the development of qualifications obtained outside the formal system and their inclusion in the IQS, which is currently the main focus of implementation work. After putting in place the legal and organisational infrastructure of the IQS and carrying out the capacity building activities for the entities involved in operating it, regulated (statutory) and non-statutory (market) qualifications, awarded outside formal education have been included. Good progress has been achieved and plans for the future are ambitious.

The implementation of the framework and the use of the common language of learning outcomes have also had a significant impact on cooperation between stakeholders, such as between employers and the VET sector – a key point of the VET reform – and cooperation in the context of the sectoral skills councils. One of the main goals of the sector skills councils is to develop sectoral qualifications frameworks, as an extension of the PQF for specific sectors. Important progress has been achieved in this area. Steps were taken to establish principles for quality assurance of qualifications and validation of non-formal and informal learning, and to support stakeholders involved with these processes. The establishment of the IQS Stakeholders Council in 2016 has been an important measure aimed at ensuring coherence and direction for PQF-related developments, involving a wide range of stakeholders.

In the coming years, activities undertaken so far will be continued. In addition to the development and inclusion of qualifications outside formal education and training in the IQS, future steps include capacity building

of ministries, awarding bodies and validation institutions to implement the solutions of the IQS. External quality assurance institutions will be prepared to perform external evaluations, coordinate the work on producing descriptions of qualifications awarded outside of the formal education and training in accordance with the standards of the IQ, and monitor and evaluate the development of the IQS and PQF.

Main sources of information

- The Unit of Integrated Qualifications System (in the Department of Strategy, Qualifications and Vocational Education) of the Ministry of National Education acts as EQF NCP: https://prk.men.gov.pl/en/2en/
- IQS portal: http://kwalifikacje.edu.pl/
- The integrated qualifications register: https://rejestr.kwalifikacje.gov.pl/en/
- Educational Research Institute (2013). *Referencing the Polish qualifications framework for lifelong learning to the European qualifications framework*. Warsaw: Educational Research Institute: https://europa.eu/europass/system/files/2020-06/Polish%20Referencing%20Report.pdf
- Educational Research Institute (2014). *Self-certification report of the national qualifications framework for higher education*. Warsaw: Educational Research Institute. http://biblioteka-krk.ibe.edu.pl/opac_css/doc_num.php?explnum_id=702

National qualification framework (NQF)

NQF LEVEL	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVEL
8	**Doctoral Diploma (Dyplom doktora) Category** Qualifications from the formal education system **Postgraduate qualification (Świadectwo ukończenia studiów podyplomowych) Category** Qualifications from the formal education system	8

| 7 | **Second cycle of higher education diploma (Master) (Dyplom ukończenia studiów drugiego stopnia)**
Category
Qualifications from the formal education system | 7 |

Integrated first and second cycle diploma (Dyplom ukończenia jednolitych studiów magisterskich)
Category
Qualifications from the formal education system

Postgraduate qualification (Świadectwo ukończenia studiów podyplomowych)
Category
Qualifications from the formal education system

Regulated and non-statutory qualifications (*)
E.g. Diagnosis and psycho-oncological help for the ill, for people after cancer, and their families and surroundings – Psycho-oncologist (Diagnoza i pomoc psychoonkologiczna osobom chorym onkologicznie, osobom po chorobie nowotworowej oraz ich rodzinom i otoczeniu – Psychoonkolog)

Checking and evaluating responses to examination tasks for matriculation examination in mathematics (Sprawdzanie i ocenianie odpowiedzi do zadań egzaminacyjnych egzaminu maturalnego z matematyki)

(*) State-regulated qualifications awarded outside the formal education and training system and non-regulated qualifications from the private sector (market qualifications) which have a PQF level assigned and have been included in the integrated qualification system (IQS) and the integrated qualification register.

6	**First cycle of higher education diploma (bachelor) (Dyplom ukończenia studiów pierwszego stopnia)** **Category** Qualifications from the formal education system	6
	Postgraduate qualification (Świadectwo ukończenia studiów podyplomowych) **Category** Qualifications from the formal education system	
	Regulated and non-statutory qualifications (*) E.g. Conducting environmental therapy for children and adolescents (Prowadzenie terapii środowiskowej dzieci i młodzieży) Conducting judicial and extrajudicial mediation in business matters (Prowadzenie mediacji sądowych i pozasądowych w sprawach gospodarczych) Designing of fire protection – sound warning systems – DSO (Projektowanie zabezpieczeń przeciwpożarowych – dźwiękowe systemy ostrzegawcze – DSO) (*) State-regulated qualifications awarded outside the formal education and training system and non-regulated qualifications from the private sector (market qualifications) which have a PQF level assigned and have been included in the integrated qualification system (IQS) and the integrated qualification register.	
5		5

Certificate of professional competence in the profession – full qualification (Dyplom potwierdzający kwalifikacje zawodowe / Dyplom zawodowy)
Category

Qualifications from the formal education system

A new structure of upper secondary education is being gradually introduced starting 2019/20, to be completed in 2023/24. Persons who learn based on the core curriculum for vocational education applicable from 1 September 2019 may obtain a certificate of professional competence or certificate of professional qualification in the profession (Dyplom zawodowy and Certyfikat kwalifikacji zawodowej, respectively).

Certificate of professional qualification in the profession – partial qualification (Świadectwo potwierdzające kwalifikację w zawodzie / Certyfikat kwalifikacji zawodowej)
Category

Qualifications from the formal education system

A new structure of upper secondary education is being gradually introduced starting 2019/20, to be completed in 2023/24. Persons who learn based on the core curriculum for vocational education applicable from 1 September 2019 may obtain a certificate of professional competence or certificate of professional qualification in the profession (Dyplom zawodowy and Certyfikat kwalifikacji zawodowej, respectively).

Certified specialist diploma – short cycle (Świadectwo dyplomowanego specjalisty/specialisty technologa)
Category

Qualifications from the formal education system

Not yet available, but officially possible according to the 2018 Law on Higher Education.

Regulated and non-statutory qualifications (*)
E.g. Planning, creating and distributing content marketing (Tworzenie oferty, planowanie i prowadzenie sprzedaży skierowanej do klientów biznesowych – handlowiec)

Conducting training using activating methods (Prowadzenie szkoleń metodami aktywizującymi)

Data recovery from HDD hard drives (Odzyskiwanie danych z dysków twardych HDD)

Restaurant work management (Zarządzanie pracą restauracji)

Planning, creating and distributing marketing content (Planowanie, tworzenie i dystrybuowanie treści marketingowych)

(*) State-regulated qualifications awarded outside the formal education and training system and non-regulated qualifications from the private sector (market qualifications) which have a PQF level assigned and have been included in the integrated

4	**Upper secondary school leaving exam certificate (matura) (4-year general secondary school) (liceum ogólnokształcące (Świadectwo dojrzałości)** **Category** Qualifications from the formal education system	4

Certificate of professional competence in the profession - full qualification (Dyplom potwierdzający kwalifikacje zawodowe / Dyplom zawodowy)
Category

Qualifications from the formal education system

A new structure of upper secondary education is being gradually introduced starting 2019/20, to be completed in 2023/24. Persons who learn based on the core curriculum for vocational education applicable from 1 September 2019 may obtain a certificate of professional competence or certificate of professional qualification in the profession (Dyplom zawodowy and Certyfikat kwalifikacji zawodowej, respectively).

Certificate of professional qualification in the profession – partial qualification (Świadectwo potwierdzające kwalifikację w zawodzie / Certyfikat kwalifikacji zawodowe)
Category

Qualifications from the formal education system

A new structure of upper secondary education is being gradually introduced starting 2019/20, to be completed in 2023/24. Persons who learn based on the core curriculum for vocational education applicable from 1 September 2019 may obtain a certificate of professional competence or certificate of professional qualification in the profession (Dyplom zawodowy and Certyfikat kwalifikacji zawodowej, respectively).

	Regulated and non-statutory qualifications (*) E.g. Designing computer graphics (Projektowanie grafiki komputerowej) Designing websites (Tworzenie witryn internetowych) Active sales to business customers – sales	
3	**Certificate of professional competence in the profession – full qualification (Dyplom potwierdzający kwalifikacje zawodowe / Dyplom zawodowy)** **Category** Qualifications from the formal education system	3
	Certificate of professional qualification in the profession – partial qualification (Świadectwo potwierdzające kwalifikację w zawodzie / Certyfikat kwalifikacji zawodowej) **Category** Qualifications from the formal education system zawodowej) (*) State-regulated qualifications awarded outside the formal education and training system and non-regulated qualifications from the private sector (market qualifications) which have a PQF level assigned and have been included in the integrated qualification system (IQS) and the integrated qualification register.	

Regulated and non-statutory qualifications (*)
E.g. Assembly of construction woodwork (Montowanie stolarki budowlanej)

Programming and servicing 3D printing (Programowanie i obsługiwanie procesu druku 3D)

Preparing food in accordance with market trends and the principles of healthy nutrition (Przygotowywanie potraw zgodnie z trendami rynkowymi i zasadami zdrowego żywienia)

Programming and operating 3D printing process (Programowanie i obsługiwanie procesu druku 3D)

Office service (Prowadzenie obsługi biura)

Preparing dishes in accordance with market trends and healthy eating principles (Przygotowywanie potraw zgodnie z trendami rynkowymi i zasadami zdrowego żywienia)

Mounting and servicing of connections and indoor installations in fibre optic technology (Montowanie i serwisowanie przyłączy oraz instalacji wewnątrzbudynkowych w technologii światłowodowej)

Joinery installation (Montowanie stolarki budowlanej)

(*) State-regulated qualifications awarded outside the

| 2 | **Lower secondary school leaving certificate (Świadectwo ukończenia gimnazjum) Category**
 Qualifications from the formal education system
 Part of the 2017 reform, lower secondary schools have been phased out; the last group of pupils from these schools graduated in June 2019; pupils graduating from grade 6 of primary school continue education in grade 7 of 8-year primary schools. | 2 |

Certificate of professional competence in the profession – full qualification (Dyplom potwierdzający kwalifikacje zawodowe / Dyplom zawodowy)
Category

Qualifications from the formal education system

A new structure of upper secondary education is being gradually introduced starting 2019/20, to be completed in 2023/24. Persons who learn based on the core curriculum for vocational education applicable from 1 September 2019 may obtain a certificate of professional competence or certificate of professional qualification in the profession (Dyplom zawodowy and Certyfikat kwalifikacji zawodowej, respectively).

Certificate of professional qualification in the profession – partial qualification (Świadectwo potwierdzające kwalifikację w zawodzie / Certyfikat kwalifikacji zawodowej)
Category

Qualifications from the formal education system

Primary school leaving certificate (8 years) (Świadectwo ukończenia szkoły podstawowej (8-letniej))
Category

Qualifications from the formal education system

Part of the 2017 reform, lower secondary schools have been phased out; the last group of pupils from these schools graduated in June 2019; pupils graduating from grade 6 of primary school continue education in grade 7 of 8-year primary schools.

	Regulated and non-statutory qualifications (*) E.g. Installation and maintenance of autonomous detectors: carbon monoxide, smoke, heat and gas (Montaż i konserwacja autonomicznych czujek: tlenku węgla, dymu, ciepła i gazu) Computer skills certificate – basic level (Certyfikat umiejętności komputerowych – poziom podstawowy) (*) State-regulated qualifications awarded outside the formal education and training system and non-regulated qualifications from the private sector (market qualifications) which have a PQF level	
1	**Primary school leaving certificate (6 years) (Świadectwo ukończenia szkoły podstawowej (6-letniej))** **Category** Qualifications from the formal education system Part of the 2017 reform, lower secondary schools have been phased out; the last group of pupils from these schools graduated in June 2019; pupils graduating from grade 6 of primary school continue education in grade 7 of 8-year primary schools.	1

Acronyms

CVET	continuing vocational education and training
ECTS	European credit transfer and accumulation system
EQF	European qualifications framework
EQF NCP	EQF national coordination point
IBE	Educational Research Institute [*Instytut Badań Edukacyjnych*]
IQR	Integrated qualifications register
IQS	integrated qualifications system
IVET	initial vocational education and training
NQF	national qualifications framework
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PISA	Programme for international student assessment
PQF	Polish qualifications framework
SQF	sectoral qualifications framework
QF-EHEA	qualifications framework for the European higher education area
VET	vocational education and training
VNFIL	validation of non-formal and informal learning

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Notes

[1] Integrated Skills Strategy 2030 (in Polish): https://www.kwalifikacje.gov.pl/images/zsu.pdf (general part). https://www.gov.pl/web/edukacja-i-nauka/zintegrowana-strategia-umiejetnosci-2030-czesc-szczegolowa--dokument-przyjety-przez-rade-ministrow (detailed part).

[2] Parliament of Poland (2015). Act of 22 December 2015 on the integrated qualifications system. Journal of Laws, No 226/2020. Subsequent amendments to the act were adopted in 2016, 2017 and 2018. https://dziennikustaw.gov.pl/D2020000022601.pdf

[3] The integrated qualifications register became available online in July 2016 at: https://rejestr.kwalifikacje.gov.pl/en/

[4] Strategy for responsible development (in Polish): https://www.gov.pl/web/fundusze-regiony/informacje-o-strategii-na-rzecz-odpowiedzialnego-rozwoju Summary in English: https://www.gov.pl/documents/33377/436740/SOR_2017_streszczenie_en.pdf

[5] The human capital development strategy 2030 (in Polish): https://www.gov.pl/web/rozwoj-praca-technologia/strategia-rozwoju-kapitalu-ludzkiego-2030

[6] Market qualifications are non-regulated qualifications awarded by private sector.

[7] Integrated skills strategy 2030, general part (in Polish): https://efs.men.gov.pl/zintegrowana-strategia-umiejetnosci-2030-czesc-ogolna/

[8] Integrated qualifications system (in Polish): https://www.kwalifikacje.gov.pl/o-zsk/prawo

[9] Resolution of the Minister of National Education of 23 December 2008 on the core curriculum for pre-school education and general education in individual types of schools (Journal of Laws 2009, No 4, item 17), replaced by the resolution of the Minister of National Education of 27 August 2012 on the core curriculum for pre-school child development and general education in specific types of schools (Journal of Laws, item 977); Act of 19 August 2011 r. on amendments to the law on the education system and certain other laws (Journal of Laws, No 205, item 1206); Act of 18 March 2011 on amendments to the Act â Law on higher education, the law on academic degrees and titles and on degrees and titles in the arts and on amendments to certain other laws (Journal of Laws, No 84, item 455 with later amendments) (Educational Research Institute, 2013).

[10] Sectoral qualifications frameworks are formally established by an act

of law. Sectors develop them and propose their inclusion into the system.

[11] Regulation of the Minister of Science and Higher Education of 2 November 2011 on the national qualifications framework for higher education. http://prawo.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WDU20112531520

[12] Regulation of the Minister of Science and Higher Education of 26 September 2016 on the characteristics of the second degree of the Polish qualifications framework typical for qualifications obtained in higher education after obtaining full qualification on level 4 â levels 6-8. http://prawo.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WDU20160001594

[13] A description of the PQF level typical for qualifications obtained in higher education should be understood as a set of general statements (components of PQF level description), characterising the knowledge, skills and social competences required for qualifications at a given level.

[14] Regulation of the Minister of Science and Higher Education of 20 September 2018 on the disciplines of science and scientific disciplines and artistic disciplines. http://prawo.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WDU20180001818

[15] OECD (2007). Revised field of science and technology (FOS) classification in the Frascati Manual. https://unstats.un.org/unsd/EconStatKB/KnowledgebaseArticle10269.aspx

[16] Education Research Institute: http://www.ibe.edu.pl/en/

[17] In banking, sports, IT, tourism, telecommunications, development services, construction, fashion industry, public health, car industry, trade, chemical engineering, agriculture, mining, real estate and energy.

[18] This section draws mainly on input from Duda, A. (2019). European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2018 update: Poland; and on Gmaj et al. (2019), the Polish one-off report on validation of non-formal and informal learning in Poland (in last section).

[19] Act of 22 December 2015 on the integrated qualifications system. Journal of Laws, No 4226/2020. Subsequent amendments to the act were adopted in 2016, 2017 and 2018. https://dziennikustaw.gov.pl/D2020000022601.pdf

[20] These include: Gmaj, I. et al. (2019). The validation of learning outcomes in Poland: new opportunities for attaining qualifications. Warsaw: Education Research Institute; digital tools and solutions such as the catalogue of validation methods, a database of good practices in validation and quality assurance; My Portfolio, a tool for creating digital portfolios.

[21] Two criteria distinguish different types of qualifications in the IQS, although they are not stated explicitly in the legislation. The first is whether the qualification relates to a level of formal education or not. The second criterion is the legal basis that governs the process of awarding

the qualification

[22] The IQS Act states that full qualifications are those awarded in the formal general and vocational education system (system oÅwiaty) after completing stages of education and the first, second and third cycle qualifications as defined in the Act on Higher Education. Full qualifications are included in the IQS by law.

[23] Such as IBE (2015). The quality assurance of qualifications in the integrated qualifications system. http://biblioteka-krk.ibe.edu.pl/opac_css/doc_num.php?explnum_id=961

[24] The criteria and procedures for inclusion of qualifications in the IQS address relevant national and/or international awarding bodies and focus on: why the qualification is needed and for whom; how the qualification is linked to similar qualifications; which are the target groups for the qualification; conditions for validation; typical use of the qualification; entitlements following from the qualification; and learning outcomes required for the qualification, including sets of individual learning outcomes.

[25] See data here.

[26] National Europass Center

[27] DybaÅ-Stronkowska, M.; PieÅkosz, J. (2019). Actors and qualifications. Analysis of selected aspects of the implementation of the Integrated Qualifications System. Warsaw: Educational Research Institute. https://kwalifikacje.edu.pl/aktorzy-i-kwalifikacje-analiza-wybranych-aspektow-wdrazania-zintegrowanego-systemu-kwalifikacji/?lang=en

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[29] https://prk.men.gov.pl/en/2en/

[30] Dictionary of the integrated qualifications system, Polish qualifications framework. User guide. Describing qualifications awarded outside the education and higher education systems. Assigning the PQF level to qualifications awarded outside the education and higher education systems. Including qualifications in the integrated qualifications system. Validation: new opportunities for acquiring qualifications. Qualifications framework, ECTS and ECVET for lifelong learning. Integrated qualifications register in practice. https://www.kwalifikacje.gov.pl/publikacje-zintegrowanego-systemu-kwalifikacji

[31] https://europa.eu/europass/system/files/2020-06/Polish%20Referencing%20Report.pdf

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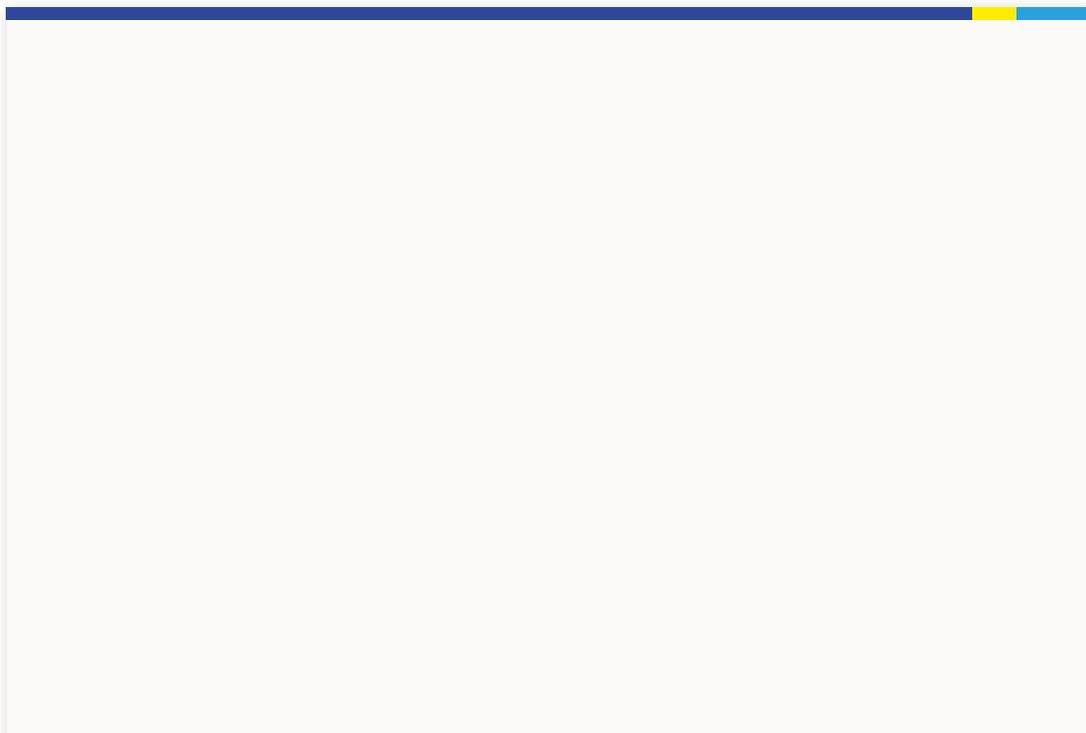
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