CEDEFOP

NQF state of play

Poland 2024

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Overview

Stage of development: [Operational stage]

NQF linked to EQF: ✓

Scope of the framework:
The NQF includes all levels and types of qualification from formal education and training, along with state-regulated and non-regulated qualifications awarded outside formal education and training.

Number of levels:

Eight

Legal basis/stage of development:

Act on the integrated qualifications system (2016)
(in Polish)

NQF/EQF website:
⌤ Website

Qualifications register/database:
⌤ Integrated qualifications register

Introduction and context

1.1. Policy context

In Poland in 2022, public expenditure on education as a percentage of gross domestic product (4.6%) was slightly below the EU average (4.7%). Participation in early childhood education and care (92.4% in 2022) was close to the EU average, while the rate of early leaving from education and training in the country was well below the EU-27 average (3.7% compared to 9.5% in 2023). In 2023, tertiary education attainment among those aged 25-34 (45.8%) was above the EU-27 average (44.2%). In 2022, the share of adults participating in adult learning remained significantly below the EU average (20.4% versus 39.5%) (European Commission, DG Education, Youth, Sport & Culture, 2024). In 2023, participation in upper secondary VET was 4 percentage points above the EU average (53.4%) ([1]).

The PQF is part of the Integrated Qualifications System (IQS), together with the Integrated Qualifications Register (IQR) and quality assurance and validation arrangements. A key feature of Poland's approach is the combined use of these instruments, addressing all levels and subsystems of education and training.

The further development of the IQS is a strategic aim of the 2020 Strategy for responsible development, supported by strategic projects included in the 2030 Human capital development strategy. According to the 2030 Integrated skills strategy, the IQS is one of the policy tools used for skills development. The policy on the digital transformation of education (2024-2035) identifies the IQS as a valuable source of information and a fundamental tool for lifelong learning policies. It also highlights the need to review the potential of free-market qualifications in supporting digital transformation (European Commission & Cedefop, 2022; 2024).

1.2. NQF legal basis

The Act on the integrated qualifications system entered into force in January 2016. It specifies the institutional framework of the IQS and outlines detailed procedures and criteria for including new qualifications. The PQF was formally adopted as an annex to the act. The act also established the IQR and defined the roles of stakeholders and the principles of quality assurance. The 2024 amendments have introduced

sectoral qualifications as a new type of qualification and adopted the term 'free-market qualifications'. The amended act outlined specific requirements to ensure the quality and transparency of these qualifications. Free-market and sectoral qualifications can only be awarded if an assessment procedure is in place and implemented to ensure that all intended learning outcomes are achieved (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

Policy objectives

The framework, with its focus on learning outcomes, is seen as an important tool for strengthening the transparency and overall consistency of education and training. Its other objectives include:

a. contributing to integrating the qualifications subsystems into the IQS;
b. increasing accessibility to and the quality of qualifications;
c. implementing the policy for lifelong learning more effectively;
d. fulfilling the Council recommendation on the EQF;
e. aligning with the broader European context of qualification systems.

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

3.1. NQF structure and level descriptors

The PQF has eight learning-outcome-based levels, covering all types of qualification. Aiming to connect education and training subsystems and facilitate synergistic developments, the framework has introduced three types of level descriptor with different degrees of generality and for different purposes:

a. universal level descriptors that form the basis of the comprehensive PQF - these descriptors are at all PQF levels and are the most generic;
b. level descriptors for the education and training subsystems and sub-frameworks - these are distinct descriptors for general education (levels 1 to 4), vocational education (levels 1 to 8) and higher education (levels 6 to 8) ([2]);
c. level descriptors for sectoral qualifications frameworks (SQFs) ([3]), developed on the basis of the second type of descriptor.

The first two types of level descriptor are interconnected and should be consulted together to fully understand the specificities of each PQF level (Educational Research Institute, 2017).

The universal learning-outcome descriptors include knowledge (scope and depth of understanding), skills (problem solving, applying knowledge in practice, learning and communication) and social competence (identity ([4]), cooperation and responsibility) (Educational Research Institute, 2017). These descriptors are based on an agreement between stakeholders in general, vocational and higher education and are the common reference point for developments at the subsystem and sector levels. The degree of specificity differs between subsystems (second type of level descriptor).

3.2. NQF scope and coverage

Three types of qualification can be included in the PQF and the IQS, classified according to whether or not they refer to a level of formal education and according to the legal basis that governs the process of awarding the qualification:

a. State-regulated qualifications within the formal education and

training system (general education, VET and higher education);
   b. State-regulated qualifications awarded outside formal education and training;
   c. non-regulated qualifications from the private sector, provided they meet specific quality criteria (free-market and sectoral qualifications).

In October 2024, the PQF included approximately 19 000 qualifications (more than 17 000 come from higher education). Since 2022, more than 70 free-market qualifications have been included, marking considerable progress in incorporating qualifications awarded outside formal education and training in the framework (222 in total). Since the introduction of sectoral qualifications by the 2024 amendment of the IQS act, 12 such qualifications have been included in the PQF. Sectoral qualifications are professional qualifications not regulated by separate regulations, which address the needs of a given industry or economic sector and are awarded by certified entities conducting statutory activities in this industry or sector. The number of State-regulated qualifications awarded outside formal education and training has also doubled since 2022 (50 in total). There are also more than 1 000 archived PQF qualifications, mainly from higher education (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

A distinction is made between full and partial qualifications included in the PQF. Full qualifications are awarded exclusively within the formal system, whereas partial qualifications can also be awarded. All qualifications awarded outside formal education and training are considered partial qualifications. According to the IQS act, these can be VET qualifications, craft certificates and diplomas, free-market and sectoral qualifications, and diplomas awarded after postgraduate non-degree studies. Microcredentials are still considered an unclear term in the national context, and are not yet legally defined. Nevertheless, some of the shorter PQF free-market qualifications can be considered as microcredentials. Policy discussions on including microcredentials in the IQS have started, but this would entail an amendment to the IQS Act. There is no clearly defined action plan or timeline for achieving this. Units of learning outcomes are not included individually in the PQF (only as parts of a VET, free-market, sectoral or postgraduate non-degree qualification) (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

International qualifications can in principle be included in the PQF through the procedure for free-market qualifications. However, currently no such qualifications are included in the PQF. Possible demotivating elements for providers may include that being part of the IQS entails that providers

operate under the control of a public authority and that PQF qualifications can be offered by different providers (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

3.3. Use of learning outcomes

The shift to learning outcomes is a core principle of the IQS. The PQF aims to integrate several qualification sub-frameworks by using learning outcomes as an overarching conceptual approach, as all IQS qualifications should be described in terms of learning outcomes. By moving beyond the general national-level descriptors, the PQF is better able to link to the development and revision of standards and curricula, and eventually to learning and assessment.

There has been an overall shift towards learning outcomes. Core curricula, formulated in terms of learning outcomes, have been introduced for all main sectors of education and training. The core curriculum for general education was gradually implemented starting with the 2009/2010 school year, and a revised core curriculum has been in place since the 2017/2018 school year. Since 2019, the core curriculum for vocational education has included not only detailed learning outcomes but also the criteria for verifying these outcomes. The core curriculum also forms the basis for assessment criteria in general education. Amendments to the act on higher education in 2011 defined 'learning outcomes' and required all study programmes and resulting qualifications to be described in terms of learning outcomes from the 2012/2013 school year. A 2016 regulation by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education replaced the concept of learning outcomes with that of 'qualification characteristics' or 'descriptions' ([5]), in full accordance with the IQS. These developments aim to promote lifelong learning and the recognition of learning acquired outside the formal system (Duda, 2019).

The IQS act and its 2024 amendments have also set a standard for describing qualifications awarded outside formal education and training in terms of learning outcomes. They have introduced a process of assessment and certification, along with internal and external quality assurance systems. Assessment procedures for achieved learning outcomes is a pre-condition for issuing free-market and sectoral qualifications (European Commission & Cedefop, 2020; 2024).

3.4. Quality assurance arrangements

One important aim of the IQS is to extend systemic quality assurance to all qualifications listed in the IQR. They must comply with uniform quality

assurance requirements that align with European guidelines and standards. For qualifications awarded in the formal education system, quality assurance procedures follow European standards and recommendations. According to the IQS act, the awarding bodies (certifying institutions) of State-regulated, free-market, and sectoral qualifications awarded outside formal education and training must have an internal quality assurance system and be part of an external quality assurance system. The purpose of the internal quality assurance system is to ensure the assessment of achieved learning outcomes and certification are properly conducted and improved. External quality assurance monitors and evaluates all activities and procedures related to awarding qualifications. It is provided by an external quality assurance institution selected by the relevant ministry. According to the 2024 amendments to the IQS act, external quality assurance of sectoral qualifications awarded by Industry Skills Centres is carried out by the Educational Research Institute (IBE) (European Commission & Cedefop, 2020; 2022; 2024).

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

The education ministry (Ministry of Education and Science) is responsible for the overall coordination of the IQS and the PQF, while the Educational Research institute (IBE) oversees the day-to-day running and coordination of the IQS, providing substantive support for its implementation, along with running the integrated qualifications register (IQR) and including IQS qualifications in it. Since 2016, the education ministry has served as the EQF national coordination point (NCP). The IBE supports and coordinates the development and inclusion of qualifications attained outside formal education in the IQS, such as assisting sectoral bodies in developing sectoral qualifications frameworks. Since 2021, a unit for coordinating the PQF development has been established within the education ministry, staffed by three posts. The IBE has approximately 100 experts working on PQF implementation. All relevant ministries have at least one expert post (some have specialised units) focusing on levelling free-market qualifications, often with support from external experts. PQF implementation is primarily financed through EU-funded projects (PLN 180 million, approximately EUR 42 million) and the State budget. These projects focus on describing new qualifications, supporting qualification-awarding bodies in designing and conducting validation, and further developing the IQR, including the creation of AI-powered tools (European Commission & Cedefop, 2022; 2024).

Representatives from relevant ministries (34 in total) participate in the Interministerial Task Force for Lifelong Learning and IQS, which monitors IQS implementation at a more strategic level. Stakeholders play a crucial role in PQF governance, decision-making, policy formulation, and system evaluation through bodies such as the IQS Stakeholder Council and sectoral competence councils (European Commission & Cedefop, 2022). The IQS Stakeholder Council is an advisory and consultative body to the education ministry. It comprises 34 representatives from education and training providers, employers, trade unions, associations of higher education institutions, commercial training institutions, local governments, learners, the education ministry, and the Central Examinations Board. The Council's responsibilities include:

a. monitoring the functioning of the IQS and proposing improvements;
b. advising on draft regulations related to the IQS;

    c. providing expert opinions on the PQF level for qualifications awarded outside formal education and training;
    d. advising on proposals to include SQFs in the IQS.

Sectoral competence councils, which include representatives of employers, employees, and sectoral public institutions, facilitate dialogue between education and the economy. They act as forums to discuss sector skill needs, such as when designing SQFs. One of their main goals is to develop SQFs as extensions of the PQF for specific sectors. By the end of 2024, there were 21 SQFs ([6]), all developed with IBE support. Sector representatives (e.g. trade unions, sector organisations) can apply to include SQFs in the IQS ([7]) (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024). SQFs have emerged as a response to the deregulation that has occurred in many sectors. They serve as reference points to support the levelling process and analyse the demand for and supply of competences and qualifications in each sector (European Commission & Cedefop, 2020).

Stakeholders are also actively involved in the day-to-day running of the PQF. For example, they help design qualification standards, assessments, and certification processes aligned with the PQF. They also participate in public consultations on applications to include qualifications in the IQS (European Commission & Cedefop, 2022).

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

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

A key aim of the IQS is to link formal education and training with learning that takes place in other contexts. The IQS Act has contributed to the development of a more consistent and quality-assured approach to, and the promotion of, validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL). The IQS Act introduced the term validation and regulated validation arrangements for free-market qualifications. General, vocational and higher education are governed by separate laws, and validation was introduced before the IQS (Budzewski, 2024). The learning-outcome-based PQF provides a reference point, signalling that qualifications at all levels can be acquired not only through formal education and training but also through non-formal and informal learning.

In general education and VET, the possibility of acquiring qualifications via VNFIL is based on extramural examinations for adults. Both initial and continuing vocational qualifications can be obtained by passing external examinations to validate professional knowledge and skills acquired in the workplace. Craft qualifications can also be awarded through validation; in this case, the examinations for journeymen and masters are conducted by the Chambers of Crafts. In higher education, prior learning can be recognised as an alternative path in order to enter or receive exemptions from a study programme (up to 50 % of ECTS credits can be gained through VNFIL) (Budzewski, 2024). The only PQF qualifications not linked to validation arrangements are the certified specialist diploma (short cycle) and primary education qualifications (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

For IQS non-formal qualifications, validation arrangements are performed under the IQS Act, by authorised institutions. The standard for these qualifications takes into account the requirements for validation, alongside the learning outcomes and assessment criteria. The IQS does not impose a single model for carrying out validation. Each qualification has its own requirements for validation, and each awarding body has some freedom in deciding the exact process and creating its own validation tools. Nevertheless, experience has shown that validation arrangements for free-market qualifications have often proved to be

challenging for providers and competent ministries (Budzewski, 2024).

5.2. Recognition of foreign qualifications

Foreign diplomas and certificates can be recognised in three ways:

a. automatically, by virtue of a national law or an international agreement;
b. by the education superintendent (*kurator oświaty*) as a result of administrative proceedings (primary and secondary education);
c. by the Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange (higher education).

No data were available to the EQF NCP on whether and how the institutions mentioned above use the PQF/EQF in the recognition of foreign qualifications (European Commission & Cedefop, 2022).

NQF implementation and impact

6.1. Stage of implementation

The PQF has reached the operational stage. It is well embedded in legislation and is a permanent and visible feature of education and training.

6.2. Procedures for including qualifications in the NQF

Learning outcomes and PQF levels of formal general education, VET, and higher education qualifications are specified in relevant legal acts.

The IQS Act has set out the criteria for the inclusion in the IQS of qualifications awarded outside formal education and training (free-market and sectoral qualifications). The procedure is initiated by the awarding body ([8]), which submits a formal application to the relevant ministry. The application should include:

a. a clear description of the qualification;
b. the learning outcomes of the qualification, categorised as knowledge, skills, and social competences;
c. a justified suggestion on the PQF level of the qualification;
d. information on assessment and validation procedures.

Experts at the relevant ministry assess the application and analyse the learning outcomes to assign a PQF level to the qualification. Independent experts review the outcomes. The process also includes public consultation, a recommendation by industry stakeholders, and an expert opinion issued by the IQS Stakeholder Council. After approval, the qualification is included in the IQR. Providers wishing to offer this qualification must receive authorisation (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024) ([9]).

For State-regulated qualifications awarded outside formal education and training, the relevant ministry initiates the procedure and develops a description and levelling suggestion for the qualification. A similar procedure to free-market qualifications is applied to craft qualifications upon request from the Polish Crafts Association. For diplomas awarded after postgraduate non-degree studies, the responsible higher education institution submits a formal application with a predefined informational list, including the proposed PQF level. The PQF level for all these types of qualifications is proposed comparing the learning outcomes with PQF

level descriptors. The IQS Stakeholder Council issues an expert opinion on the proposed PQF level (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

6.3. Indicating EQF/NQF levels

PQF/EQF levels are indicated on the certificates and diplomas of all levelled qualifications, apart from some diplomas awarded after postgraduate non-degree studies at levels 6 to 8. The levels are indicated on the Europass certificates and diploma supplements of most formal VET and higher education qualifications. Levels are indicated on all qualifications included in the IQR (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

6.4. NQF dissemination

The PQF has been communicated and promoted as part of, and along with, the IQS. The IQS communication and promotion strategy is in its final stage of development. The key actions have targeted three main groups: IQS architects, ambassadors, and beneficiaries. So far, communication has aimed to increase awareness and understanding of the lifelong learning policy and the PQF, and to foster the engagement of key stakeholders to ensure successful implementation (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

The main online communication channels that have been used are the IQS portal (providing information on the system and qualifications) and website, the EQF NCP website and social media such as Facebook and YouTube (the IBE is also active on X and LinkedIn). The IQS portal offers learner-oriented information and publications, as well as specific information for employees. Further, there is a long list of publications aimed at helping experts and the public to understand the learning-outcomes approach better and assisting all actors involved in developing new qualifications, such as ministries, education and training providers, quality assurance bodies, and qualification-awarding bodies. The IBE has also developed an interactive user guide for IQR.

The country has set up regional IQS information centres targeting employees, teachers, students, jobseekers, employers and career counsellors. A long series of public relations activities, seminars, conferences and forums has been organised to disseminate the IQS and the PQF and bring different stakeholders together. The IBE has been carrying out information activities, including consultation seminars for career counsellors working in labour market institutions and education. In addition, through the campaign 'Education in your hands' (*Edukacja w*

zasięgu ręki), which promotes education and lifelong learning, a variety of films and audio presentations have been developed to raise awareness of the IQS (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

6.5. Qualifications databases and registers

The integrated qualifications register (IQR) functions as an information source for all IQS qualifications, targeting learners, ministries, education and training providers, employers, and researchers. The IQR allows users to search for and compare qualifications. Since 2020, there has been significant progress in including qualifications in the IQR. By October 2024, there were 19 000 qualifications listed. The IBE is responsible for regularly updating the IQR. The register features a chatbot that helps users find information on a qualifications using a semantic search mechanism. It also suggests qualifications based on end users' hobbies, interests, and predispositions. The IQR is connected to the Europass platform (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

The register provides information in Polish (and in English for approximately 1 500 qualifications as of October 2024) on the PQF/EQF level, the awarding body, credit points or notional workload (if applicable), the external quality assurance or regulatory body, the entry requirements, ways to acquire the qualification and the relationship to occupations or occupational fields. It also includes additional information and a link to the qualification. The register offers the option to include both short ([10]) and full descriptions of learning outcomes (free-market and sectoral qualifications have both). The presentation of learning outcomes typically varies across qualifications. They may be summarised, organised into sets of intended learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and social competences), or provided as analytical descriptions. The IBE has developed a guidebook for higher education institutions.

The IBE has also created several qualifications-related online tools linked to the IQR and based on its data. VET Compass helps schoolchildren find VET qualifications based on their areas of interest. It includes information on schools in a specific region and the expected regional labour market needs in the field. NIWUS is a tool designed to support the description of qualifications, their levelling to the PQF, and their comparison with similar qualifications. My Portfolio helps individuals showcase their competences, collect various achievements in one place and present them in a user-friendly way. The Odznaka+ system is a web-based application that allows for the issuing, staged accumulation, storage and sharing of digital microcredentials in the form of open badges (standard and digitally secured PDF certificates) (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

6.6. Awareness and use of the NQF

Using the PQF is mandatory for institutions within the formal education system, as curricula must be based on learning outcomes derived from the PQF. Additionally, the Central Examination Board (CKE) uses PQF levels and associated level descriptors as key reference points when designing the content of vocational examinations leading to qualifications at PQF levels 2 to 5. In non-formal training, many providers apply to include new qualifications in the IQS. Learners, particularly in VET, have a high level of awareness of the PQF. Its levels are indicated on certificates and diplomas, and core curricula and examination requirements are PQF-based. A wealth of information targeting learners is also available online. However, this is not the case for workers, jobseekers, and individual employers. It is difficult to assess their level of awareness and use, but it tends to be relatively low. Employer representatives and trade unions actively participate in IQS-related consultations and are members of the IQS Stakeholders Council. Public employment services also have a high level of awareness due to their involvement in various workshops and meetings. Guidance counsellors are knowledgeable about the IQS, its structure and principles, the procedure for including qualifications, and the opportunities it offers to end users. This knowledge is gained through IBE consultation seminars and is applied in their daily work. Guidance counsellors use tools such as Competence cards, which support the identification and description of qualifications in the field of personal, social, and learning skills. The IQS has extended the systemic approach to quality assurance to include IQR qualifications awarded outside formal education and training (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

6.7. Monitoring and evaluating the NQF

PQF implementation is supported by research projects and studies. Although no PQF/IQS evaluation study has been conducted yet, various aspects of the IQS functioning have been assessed. A system to monitor IQS implementation is being established. In 2019, the final report on the implementation of the IQS was published, assessing the efficiency and complexity of the process for including market qualifications in the IQS. Markowska (2018) evaluated the potential of the external quality assurance institutions to ensure the quality of IQS qualifications that are awarded. Both reports highlighted that procedures for including qualifications need to become more efficient. In 2022, an analysis of the needs of IQS external quality assurance entities was carried out. Key findings include:

    a. external quality assurance entities would benefit from continuous

support (e.g. staff training on standards, sharing of tools) and peer learning to exchange experiences;

b. funding mechanisms and the organisation of external quality assurance can be further improved.

In 2023, a research study on the level of awareness of the IQS and IQR in upper secondary schools was completed. The study revealed a need to promote lifelong learning and improve career guidance at the school level. The findings will be used to communicate better the role of qualifications in upper secondary schools (European Commission & Cedefop, 2022; 2024).

6.8. Impact of the NQF

Work on the PQF is an integral part of the broader reform and modernisation of the IQS, addressing all levels and subsystems of education and training. An important aspect of this reform, supported by the PQF, has been the shift towards learning outcomes. For example, qualifications awarded outside formal education and training must be drafted in learning outcomes to be included in the IQS and qualify for public funding. The PQF has contributed to the redesign of programmes, standards and curricula. It has been a vital tool in increasing the transparency and international credibility of education and training, and qualifications, including those awarded outside formal education and training. The IQS has played a crucial role in fostering quality assurance, particularly for qualifications awarded outside formal education and training. As all qualifications can be included in the IQS if they meet predefined requirements, the system promotes parity of esteem between different types of education and training, and different types of qualifications, and bridges formal and non-formal education. For instance, vocational and professional qualifications are also included at levels 5 to 7, indicating the high level of skills and competences they provide. Additionally, free-market qualifications can be levelled at levels 6 to 8. Sectoral qualifications frameworks are an example of bridging different sectors, as they are developed cooperatively by representatives of the labour market and educational institutions. Sectoral competence councils have played a key role in this process. The work of sectoral competence councils has also helped identify skills gaps and propose new qualifications. Sectoral and free-market qualifications are increasingly included in the PQF. Including sectoral qualifications in the PQF can become a crucial tool to support Sectoral Skills Centres (*Branżowe Centra Umiejętności*) in promoting labour-market-related adult and youth training (European Commission & Cedefop, 2022; 2024).

IQS and PQF implementation activities, coordinated by the IBE and involving representatives of the education ministry and the Central Examinations Board - such as informing awarding bodies, external quality assurance entities and validation institutions about how to operate according to IQS principles - have strengthened the dialogue and cooperation between stakeholders across education and training sectors. Sectoral competence councils have promoted links between the labour market and education. For instance, developing SQFs involves cooperation between representatives of these areas. Further, according to the law, IVET schools must cooperate with employers, promote workplace-based practical training, regularly update the skills of VET teachers, and address skills mismatches (European Commission & Cedefop, 2022; 2024).

Referencing to the EQF

The PQF was referenced to the EQF in 2013 (Educational Research Institute, 2013). A separate report on the self-certification of the national qualifications framework for higher education against the QF-EHEA was also developed (Educational Research Institute, 2014). Following the 2024 amendments to the IQS Act, an updated referencing report is expected. This report will cover the major changes in the IQS since 2015 (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

Important lessons and future plans

By introducing the IQS, which is closely linked to the PQF and IQR, along with quality assurance and validation arrangements, Poland has adopted a holistic approach. This approach has been a key factor in successful policy implementation. The government considers their joint implementation essential for improving the quality of human capital. Developing the legal framework and administrative infrastructure, alongside capacity building for entities involved in operating the PQF and the IQS (e.g. ministries, awarding bodies and external quality assurance entities), were critical factors in making the PQF and the IQS operational in a relatively short time. Another indicator of success is the increasing number of qualifications awarded outside formal education and training that are included in the PQF (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

Challenges include how the IQS can support further modernisation of formal education and training and promote adult learning and lifelong learning. Limited funding is also a concern. For example, the number of awarded free-market qualifications remains rather low due to ineffective funding mechanisms and low awareness caused by insufficient promotion. IQS tools should also align with the public employment service, counselling services, and the training activities under the National Training Fund of the labour ministry. Efforts should continue to institutionalise employers' and other stakeholders' involvement in public dialogue on the skills agenda (e.g. by further utilising the sectoral competence councils) (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

The main priorities include ensuring the efficiency of the IQS, further developing the IQR, and using them together with the PQF as policy tools to promote lifelong learning and skills development. Other specific priorities include supporting PQF implementers by sharing good practices and improving operational methods; supporting awarding bodies; improving dissemination actions; raising awareness of the certification of qualifications and skills acquired through non-formal and informal learning; adjusting the qualification system to address challenges such as mass migration and the recognition of migrants' skills; conducting research and analysis on the demand for skills and qualifications and on non-formal and informal learning; and developing innovative tools and data resources related to qualifications, skills and classifications (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

Main sources of information

[URLs accessed 15/5/2025]

Integrated Qualifications System (IQS).

Integrated Qualifications Register (IQR).

EQF NCP.

Educational Research Institute. (2013). *Referencing Report - Referencing the Polish qualifications framework for lifelong learning to the European qualifications framework*.

National qualification framework (NQF)

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

7	**Second-cycle higher education diploma (master) (Dyplom ukończenia studiów drugiego stopnia)**	7
	Category	
	Qualifications from the formal education system	
	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	
	Qualifications awarded outside the formal education system	
	Example of free-market qualification: diagnosis and psycho-oncological help for people who are ill, for people after cancer and for their families and surroundings – psycho-oncologist (Diagnoza i pomoc psychoonkologiczna osobom chorym onkologicznie, osobom po chorobie nowotworowej oraz ich rodzinom i otoczeniu – Psychoonkolog)	
	Example of regulated qualification: checking and evaluating responses to examination tasks for the matriculation examination in mathematics (Sprawdzanie i ocenianie odpowiedzi do zadań egzaminacyjnych egzaminu maturalnego z matematyki)	

6	**First-cycle 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	
5	**Diploma of professional competence in the profession - full qualification (Dyplom potwierdzający kwalifikacje zawodowe / Dyplom zawodowy)** **Category** Qualifications from the formal education system Since 2019/2020, a new upper secondary education structure has gradually been introduced, (completed in 2023/2024). Programmes based on the 2019 core curriculum for vocational education can lead to a diploma of professional competence or certificate of professional qualification in the profession.	5
	Certificate of professional qualification in the profession - partial qualification (Świadectwo potwierdzające kwalifikację w zawodzie / Certyfikat kwalifikacji zawodowej) **Category** Qualifications from the formal education system Since 2019/2020, a new upper secondary education structure has gradually been introduced, (completed in 2023/2024). Programmes based on the 2019 core curriculum for vocational education can lead to a diploma of professional competence or certificate of professional qualification in the profession.	
	Certified specialist diploma - short cycle (Świadectwo dyplomowanego specjalisty / specjalisty technologa) **Category** Qualifications from the formal education system	

Qualifications awarded outside the formal education system

Example of free-market qualifications: 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 hard drives (Odzyskiwanie danych z dysków twardych HDD); restaurant management (Zarządzanie pracą restauracji);
crafts qualification: baker – master diploma (Piekarz – dyplom mistrzowski)

| 4 | **Upper secondary school leaving exam certificate (matura) (4-year general secondary school (liceum ogólnokształcące) (Świadectwo dojrzałości))** | 4 |

Category

Qualifications from the formal education system

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

Category

Qualifications from the formal education system

Since 2019/2020, a new upper secondary education structure has gradually been introduced, (completed in 2023/2024). Programmes based on the 2019 core curriculum for vocational education can lead to a diploma of professional competence or certificate of professional qualification in the profession.

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

Qualifications from the formal education system

Since 2019/2020, a new upper secondary education structure has gradually been introduced, (completed in 2023/2024). Programmes based on the 2019 core curriculum for vocational education can lead to a diploma of professional competence or certificate of professional qualification in the profession.

Qualifications awarded outside the formal education system

Example of free-market qualifications: designing computer graphics (Projektowanie grafiki komputerowej); creating clothing templates for the production of industrial clothing (Konstruowanie szablonów odzieżowych do produkcji przemysłowej odzieży); piloting tourist events (Pilotowanie imprez turystycznych)

Example of sectoral qualification: tourguiding (Przewodnictwo turystyczne)

Example of crafts qualification: eyeglass optician - journeyman certificate (Optyk okularowy – świadectwo czeladnicze)

3   3

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

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Qualifications from the formal education system

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Qualifications awarded outside the formal education system

Example of free-market qualifications: assembly of construction woodwork (Montowanie stolarki budowlanej); programming and servicing of 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); mounting and servicing of connections and indoor installations in fibre optic technology (Montowanie i serwisowanie przyłączy oraz instalacji wewnątrzbudynkowych w technologii światłowodowej)

2

Example of crafts qualification: furniture carpenter - journeyman certificate (Stolarz meblowy - świadectwo czeladnicze)

2

Lower secondary school leaving certificate (Świadectwo ukończenia gimnazjum)
Category

Qualifications from the formal education system

Lower secondary schools have been phased out and primary education has been prolonged from six to eight years. No 'new' lower secondary diplomas have been issued since 2018, but all diplomas issued up to 2017 had the PQF level indicated. Primary school (eight years) leaving certificate has been levelled at PQF/EQF level 2.

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

Qualifications from the formal education system

Since 2019/2020, a new upper secondary education structure has gradually been introduced, (completed in 2023/2024). Programmes based on the 2019 core curriculum for vocational education can lead to a diploma of professional competence or certificate of professional qualification in the profession.

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

Qualifications from the formal education system

Since 2019/2020, a new upper secondary education structure has gradually been introduced, (completed in 2023/2024). Programmes based on the 2019 core curriculum for vocational education can lead to a diploma of professional competence or certificate of professional qualification in the profession.

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

Qualifications from the formal education system

	Qualifications awarded outside the formal education system	
	Example of free-market qualifications: 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)	
1	**Primary school leaving certificate (6 years) (Świadectwo ukończenia szkoły podstawowej (6-letniej)) Category**	1
	Qualifications from the formal education system	
	Lower secondary schools have been phased out and primary education has been prolonged from six to eight years. No 'new' lower secondary diplomas have been issued since 2018, but all diplomas issued up to 2017 had the PQF level indicated. Primary school (eight years) leaving certificate has been levelled at PQF/EQF level 2.	

Acronyms

EQF	European qualifications framework
IBE	Instytut Badań Edukacyjnych (Educational Research Institute)
IQR	Zintegrowany Rejestr Kwalifikacji (Integrated Qualifications Register)
IQS	Zintegrowanym Systemie Kwalifikacji (Integrated Qualifications System)
NCP	national coordination point
NQF	national qualifications framework
PQF	Polska Rama Kwalifikacji (Polish qualifications framework)
SQF	sectoral qualifications framework
VET	vocational education and training
VNFIL	validation of non-formal and informal learning

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Notes

[1]More information at Eurostat [educ_uoe_enra13], accessed 5 May 2025.

[2]At level 5 there are also descriptors serving as a bridge between descriptors typical of qualifications attained in general education (level 4) and those typical of qualifications attained in higher education.

[3]SQFs are formally established by an act of law. In accordance with the IQS act, they are a description of levels of qualifications functioning in each economic sector. SQF levels refer to the relevant PQF levels. Sectors develop them and propose their inclusion in the IQS (Chapter 5).

[4]Readiness to accept the obligations resulting from membership of various communities.

[5]A description of the typical PQF level 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.

[6]In the fields of banking; sports; IT; tourism; telecommunications; development services; construction; the fashion industry; public health; trade; chemical engineering; agriculture; the energy sector; the automotive sector; waste management; water and wastewater management, land reclamation and remediation; mining; and real estate marketing communication, food processing, cybersecurity.

[7]Six SQFs have been included in the IQS (tourism, sports, trade, development services, construction, energy sector).

[8]Applications for sectoral qualifications can be submitted by sectoral organisations, such as employers' organizations, chambers of commerce, professional associations.

[9]Information was also retrieved from the background note developed by Polish representatives for the Peer Learning Activity on the Inclusion of Qualifications from Outside Formal Education and Training in NQFs Referenced to the EQF (April, 2025).

[10]A concise description of the knowledge, skills, and competencies that a learner is expected to have acquired (maximum number of characters 9 000). It is usually written in a bullet-point format and is intended to provide a quick summary of the main learning outcomes.

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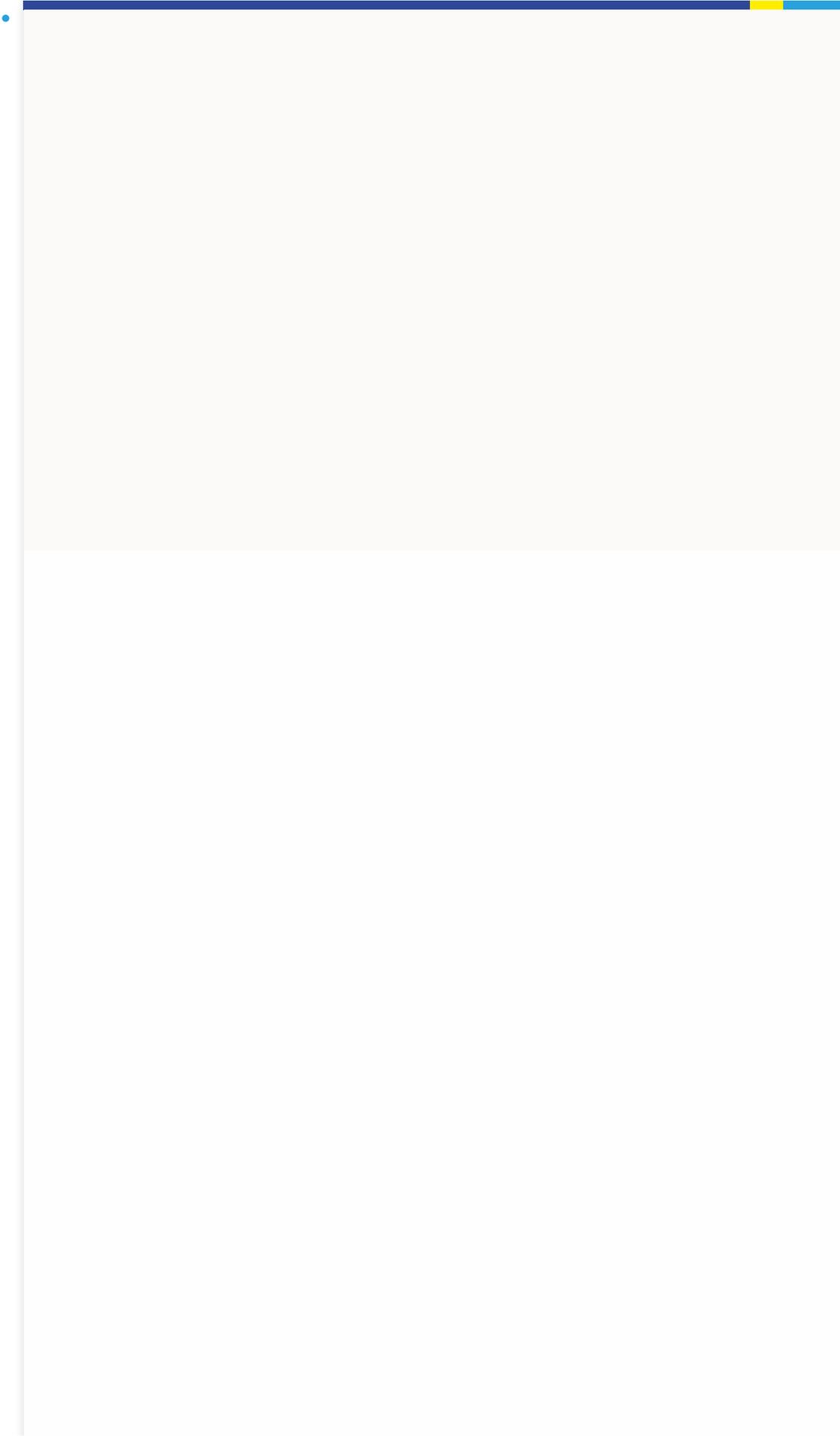
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