



CEDEFOP

European Centre for the Development
of Vocational Training



EN



Country report

Poland

2016 update to the European inventory
on validation of non-formal and informal learning

Author: Aleksandra Duda

Acknowledgements

This country update was produced by Aleksandra Duda, as part of the 2016 update to the European inventory on validation, a project managed by ICF (lead consultants: Jo Hawley, Ilona Murphy and Manuel Souto-Otero) under the supervision of a Steering Committee formed by Cedefop (Ernesto Villalba, Hanne Christensen, and Jens Bjornavold), the European Commission (Koen Nomden, Lieve Van den Brande, Martina Ni Cheallaigh, Corinna Liersch and Anna Nikowska) and the ETF (Anna Kahlson and Eduarda Castel-Branco). It is based on the 2014 country report written by Aleksandra Duda and Maciej Gruza. The report has benefitted from feedback from the European qualifications framework advisory group (EQF AG) members for Poland as well as other national-level quality assurance (QA) contacts with expertise in validation.

Work was carried out under Cedefop's service contract No 2014- 0182/AO/ECVL/JB-EVGAR/2016-Validation-Inventory/014/14.

Disclaimer:

The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the position or opinion of the European Commission, Cedefop, the ETF, the ICF, the EQF AG members or the other QA contacts. Neither the European Commission nor any person/organisation acting on behalf of the Commission is responsible for the use which might be made of any information contained in this publication. The publication has neither been edited nor proof-read by Cedefop's editing service.

1 Introduction and Evaluation

1.1 Abstract

In 2016, Poland implemented a new national qualifications system encompassing the Polish Qualifications Framework (PQF) and the Integrated Qualifications Register. As such, it closed the cycle of reforms that have been taking place in general, vocational and higher education over the past years (see Referencing report – an update, 2015). An important element of this system is the possibility of validating learning outcomes achieved outside the school and higher education systems, including through non-formal and informal learning. It is accompanied by the implementation of general, binding rules and standards for validation that apply also outside the formal education system. By extending the possibility of accumulating and transferring the learning outcomes achieved in various contexts, these changes allow for greater flexibility in obtaining further qualifications and adjusting learning pathways to different life conditions and circumstances.

1.2 Main changes since the 2014 update

The main change that has taken place since the 2014 update was the adoption of the Act of 22 December 2015 on the Integrated Qualifications System (IQS), which describes all qualifications awarded in Poland by authorised entities (OJ 2016 item 64). Its key elements are the Polish Qualifications Framework (PQF) and the Integrated Qualifications Register (IQR). Some legal changes took place also in the higher education sector that aimed at reinforcing the principle of lifelong learning as well as the recognition of learning outcomes acquired outside of the formal education system (The Ministry of Science and Higher Education, 2014).

A formal definition of validation was introduced recently through the above-mentioned Act on the IQS, which came into force on 15 January 2016. Validation is defined therein as an assessment whether a person applying for the award of a specific qualification achieved a part or all of the learning outcomes required for the given qualification, regardless of how the learning was acquired. The Act also specifies the requirements for bodies carrying out validation and certification, the rules for obtaining the permit to carry out certification, the principles for quality assurance in validation and certification, as well as the rules for monitoring of both processes.

These central regulations address validation as a systemic solution, developed from a national perspective. The Act on IQS organises the already functioning validation arrangements and makes the system more coherent. This refers, above all, to the two main validation frameworks that have already been in place covering vocational education and training in school and in the craft system. Also in the higher education sector, the amendment of 2014 to the Act on Higher Education opened the possibility to recognise prior learning acquired in organised and unorganised processes outside of the education system. The main driver behind the implementation of these solutions, common for all sectors, is to improve the response of education to the labour market needs, particularly in the context of ever-changing demand for skills. It is also to address the needs and capabilities of adults by encouraging them to confirm their qualifications obtained such as over the course of their work. It is particularly relevant given that the number of learners in this group is relatively low in Poland compared to the EU average.

The newly established national qualifications system creates the possibility of a broader consideration and formal documentation of new competences acquired in very different ways throughout life (Referencing report – an update, 2015). Such a solution addresses the issue of the variety of arrangements, industries, organisations and institutions involved in the area of validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes in Poland. The most important benefits of the IQS include, among others:

- universal acceptance of learning outcomes as a primary point of reference when creating education and training programmes;
- quicker, simpler and more accessible ways to attain credentials or certificates for qualifications including those acquired outside formal education and training;
- ensuring the quality and transparency of all elements in the qualifications system;
- easier assessment of education and training offers (presented in more understandable ways); and
- better linking of national educational offer to the needs of society and the labour market (IBE, 2015a).

With respect to the requirements for validation, they are general and do not exclude various possible courses of validation or the use of different methods and verification tools for the same qualification. Therefore, those entities that have the status of certifying authority for the qualification in question are free to develop their own validation procedures for the given qualification. The only limitation is the description of the qualification, which includes requirements for validation.

Currently, there are many service providers of varying quality on the certification market. While some validation arrangements are of high-quality, it also happens that some certificates do not always provide a credible confirmation of the acquired competences. The IQS' role is thus to increase the comparability of individual arrangements and assure quality of validation processes. Accordingly, the improved quality of the qualifications should contribute to greater transparency and credibility of qualifications awarded in Poland. This, in turn, is expected to increase the confidence of learners towards qualifications and entities that award them (Bacia, 2014). This is particularly important in the context of the low level of public trust in the validation processes in Poland (and in government initiatives in general), as well as the lack of trust in the evidence of learning outcomes (Regional Labour Office in Cracow, 2015).

Taking this into account, the new system imposes, in a formalised way, a number of obligations on validating institutions in order to ensure consistency and – at least in theory – a high quality of validation processes. On the other hand, the excessive formalisation may discourage the representatives of the commercial training sector from adopting these solutions. If the costs of operating within this validation system are too high for them, the benefits may appear as too small in relation to the expenditure incurred.

The situation in which the commercial training sector ignores the new validation arrangements related to the IQS can pose a significant challenge for further development of this system. This is also due to the fact that some of the assumptions of the Qualifications Register can be difficult or impossible to fulfil, particularly by the niche training providers. Moreover, the system may not correspond to the needs and expectations of some larger players either. For big companies that award informal training certificates, the advantages of adapting to the new system may not be so evident. More specific challenges revealed by the piloting of IQS pointed to: i) problematic recording of step by step validation (as the process providing various alternative outcomes at each stage); ii) problems with documentation (e.g. lack of habits of collecting documents); iii) difficulties in determining competences through self-assessment; and, iv) mastering the validation-related terminology (IBE Team, 2015).

Finally, as for specific initiatives directed to the validation of skills for immigrants/refugees, new regulations on recognition of education obtained abroad were implemented into the Act on Education System in March 2015 (OJ 2015 item 357). They introduce a special proceeding for confirmation of educational qualifications' levels of specific groups of persons who have significant difficulties with the provision of an original (or duplicate) of an education certificate or the authentication of such document. This refers to refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection as well as other persons who hold a permit for temporary stay in

Poland or who have suffered a loss as a result of an armed conflict, natural disaster or other humanitarian crisis.

2 National perspective

2.1 Overarching approach to validation

As explained in the previous updates, the Polish authorities attach a growing importance to the lifelong learning approach to education and to the learning outcomes. This is associated with a departure from the traditional way of carrying out examinations in institutions of formal education that were focused on a lecture programme (teacher-oriented approach) (Wyrozębowski, 2013). This shift is well demonstrated by the implementation of a strategic document, the 'Lifelong learning perspective', adopted as a part of the 'Human Capital Development Strategy' in 2013. Its main aim is to highlight the two dimensions of lifelong learning (taking account of the potential of non-formal and informal learning) as well as the learning outcomes. It indicates the need for assessment and recognition of competences as learning outcomes, irrespective of the method, place and time of their acquisition (Prime Minister's Office, 2013).

In 2014, new legislative measures on lifelong learning have been introduced in the higher education system. The amendment to the Act on Higher Education defined 'learning outcomes' (in addition to 'education outcomes') and introduced regulations on validation of learning outcomes acquired outside of the formal education system. By allowing the higher educational institutions to recognise the knowledge and skills acquired during training, courses, at work and in volunteering and to count them as part of studies, this law opens the way for workers who want to change their profession or supplement their education (The Ministry of Science and Higher Education, 2014). Although the scope of application of these legal changes is rather limited (see Section 2.2), these are the first regulations on the implementation of a lifelong learning principle that address qualifications obtained in the higher education system (see Referencing report – an update, 2015).

In light of the above, the newly established IQS becomes a fundamental tool to support the implementation of the lifelong learning principles. By providing easy access to reliable information on qualifications that can be obtained in Poland, it should make it easier for learners to design their educational pathways according to their individual needs. It also opens new possibilities for obtaining qualifications, regardless of where, how or when the learning outcomes have been acquired (Banyś, 2014).

The provisions on the IQS are also a response to various policy documents, already mentioned in the 2010 and 2014 updates, which refer to the need for establishing a system of validation covering all contexts of education at all levels. These include the national 'horizontal' or 'integrated' strategies (not specific strategies for selected sectors) such as:

- The Human Capital Operational Programme 2007-2013;
- Knowledge, Education, Development Operational Programme 2014-2020;
- The National Development Strategy 2020, adopted by the government in 2012, underlines the need to create a system for recognising and validating competencies acquired outside of the formal school system;
- The Human Capital Development Strategy 2020, adopted by the government in 2013, underlining the need to develop a national system of recognition of qualifications and validation, including the confirmation of the competences acquired outside formal education;
- The Social Capital Development Strategy 2020, adopted by the government in 2013, pointing to the need to support non-formal and informal education aimed at cooperation, creativity and social communication;

- The Strategy for Innovation and Effectiveness of Economy 'dynamic Poland 2020' underlines the need to develop a non-formal and informal learning system; and,
- Poland 2030 Report (prepared by the Prime Minister's Strategic Advisory Panel) outlines the vision of possible development paths and reforms in Poland in the next 20 years, such as the 'change of dominant formula in adult education from school-based methods of formal education into an increasing access to various forms of non-formal and informal learning'.

In general, developments taken and introduced at the European level have been included in Polish education and training policy and in the above-mentioned 'Lifelong learning perspective'. The wider changes taking place in Europe related to the implementation of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) for lifelong learning are among the main reasons why the validation of informal and non-formal learning outcomes gained importance in Poland. They provide the context for the reforming efforts on the national qualifications system in Poland and for validation more specifically (Referencing report – an update, 2015).

Equally important is the national setting and its corresponding needs. As explained in the 2010 and 2014 updates, the Polish learning culture remains dominated by learning in a formal context, where formal qualifications verified on the basis of examinations are still preferred. As a consequence, the underestimated value of practical, especially non-formal and informal learning creates one of the key obstacles for increasing the current low work supply among people under the age of 25 and those who are 45 and older (Poland 2030 report, 2009). This is further confirmed by official results in reaching European benchmarks for 2020 that are to guide progress on the Education and Training 2020 Work Programme.¹ Although Poland has relatively easily reached the values established for four (out of five) benchmarks for the development of education in Europe, the rate for adult participation in lifelong learning education still remains low compared to the EU average.²

The main barrier for the development of lifelong learning has been mainly the lack of consistency between the qualifications awarded in the school and higher education systems and outside of these systems. This, in turn, had an adverse effect on the possibility of expanding more flexible forms of adult education. Other characteristics of the Polish qualifications system – closely linked to such a situation – are also targeted by reforms on: the variety and inconsistency of legal and organisational solutions for qualifications obtained outside of the education system; low credibility of some training offers and certification options; and, incomparability of qualifications, both within the country and at European level (IBE, 2015b).

The legal environment has been adjusting over the past years to address challenges in this respect. The recently introduced Act on the Integrated Qualifications System (IQS) organises the system of vocational qualifications in Poland by introducing general solutions concerning the qualifications awarded outside of the formal education system. These new regulations provide for the creation of two instruments integrating the Polish qualification system: the eight-level Polish Qualifications Framework (PQF) and the Integrated Qualifications Register (IQR). The law also introduced a definition of qualifications and their distinction into: full qualifications – awarded exclusively within the formal systems of school and higher education (e.g. a matriculation certificate); and partial qualifications – awarded by training

¹ Participation of adults (25-64) in non-formal and informal learning is one of five indicators in the field of education and training, which reflects Member States' performance in reaching the Europe 2020 Strategy objectives. Accordingly, the validation of non-formal and informal learning constitutes a key element of the EU's actions to support education and training.

² For instance, the rate reached 4.9 % in 2005, 5.1 % in 2007, 5.3 % in 2010, 4.5 % in 2011, and 4.5 % in 2012. In comparison, the corresponding average for the European Union (27 countries) in 2005 - 2012 oscillates around 9 % (Education and Training 2020: European benchmarks).

companies, among others (e.g. driver's license). Yet, for the full operation of the system, a number of implementing regulations must be first enacted.

Other relevant legal changes which have been introduced since the 2014 update includes the already mentioned amendments to existing laws on higher and general education. The amendment to the Act on Higher Education that entered into force on 1 October 2014 allows, inter alia, to validate the knowledge and skills acquired during courses, training, professional work, volunteering and to count them as a part of studies. It also introduced a practical profile of studies, the NQF in higher education and a long apprenticeship period. These changes emerged partially in response to employers' and higher education sector's expectations to better meet the labour market needs.

A new legal initiative is also the Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 25 March 2015 on the procedure for recognition of certificates or other documents or proofs of education or rights to continue education obtained in a foreign education system. It opens the possibility for representatives of specific groups who do not have relevant certificates for particular reasons to apply for a special procedure of confirmation of educational qualification's level. In doing so, they can submit various other documents instead, such as papers confirming that they have been employed in a certain profession, which required corresponding level of education, or oral statements. They can also take part in the verification interview conducted by the education superintendent to assess their level of education. Given the short period since the implementation of this change, there have been no examples of practical application of these solutions. It is therefore difficult to assess at the time of writing this report whether these arrangements are efficient or not. According to some third sector representatives engaged in assisting foreigners staying in Poland, the focus on assessing the level of education may be insufficient. In their view, an on-the-job assessment of skills could be a useful solution as many immigrants and refugees have never attended any school education.

Apart from the above, the legislative measures presented in the 2014 update have not changed significantly regarding the issue of validation over the past two years. After a substantial amendment to the Act on Education adopted in 2011 and related regulations, the most recent changes in the law relate to specific issues of a mainly organisational nature (e.g. training in several new occupations, improving the organisation and conduct of professional examinations, classification occupations for vocational education, practical teaching profession).

2.2 Validation in education and training

The Integrated Qualification System (IQS) promotes the dissemination of validation and certification of learning outcomes acquired through practical experience. It covers all four validation stages – i.e. identification, documentation, assessment and certification – to a similar extent. Together with the implementation of the Polish Qualifications Framework (PQF), it integrated the existing arrangements by introducing overarching measures in order to bring more consistency across all education sectors. More specific validation procedures are individual for each education level.

As explained in previous updates, currently functioning arrangements for validation apply mainly to the VET sector and the craft trades (regulated by a separate law; please see Section 2.4). While in the case of the latter, validation has been in place since the 1950s; in the case of the school system, the framework was introduced during the major reform in 2012. As a result of this change, validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes in Poland can take the form of extra-mural exams, which allow confirming primary, lower secondary, upper secondary and basic vocational education (in the area of general education implemented in vocational schools).

It is also possible to obtain vocational qualifications (identical to those awarded in a school system) after passing external vocational examinations (both in IVET and CVET systems).

These exams are an option for persons with professional experience to validate their knowledge and skills without participating in the qualifying vocational course or attending the school. In order to take the extra-mural vocational exam, it is necessary to: 1) graduate from lower secondary school (*gimnazjum*) or an eight-year primary school; and 2) complete at least two years of education or work in a profession from which the particular qualification was extracted (in accordance with the classification of occupations for vocational education). This type of examination is a part of the external examinations system conducted by Regional Examination Boards.

Government regulations on validation of learning outcomes acquired outside the formal system apply also to the craft trades, which offer an alternative learning path to school-based vocational education. In this case, the examinations are conducted by the Chambers of Crafts, which conduct the exams for both selected 'school' professions, as well as occupations included in the classification of specialities for the labour market (Bacia ed., 2013). Validation procedures for professions outside the classification of occupations for vocational education that refer to economic classification are determined by Ministers other than the Minister in charge of Education.

In the higher education system, the amended Act on Higher Education (2014) introduced the first regulations on validation of learning outcomes acquired outside of the formal education system. They refer only to the recognition of prior learning, i.e. when relevant professional experience can shorten the learning cycle while applying for first- or second-cycle programmes (Referencing report – an update, 2015). This refers to candidates with: 1) a high school diploma (*matura*) and at least five years of professional experience if they apply for bachelor and long-cycle studies; 2) a bachelor's degree or equivalent and three years of professional experience gained after graduation in case of applying for second-degree studies; and, 3) a master's degree (or equivalent title) and at least two years of professional experience after graduation, if admission concerns the next field studies (the first or the second degree). The organisation of the process of recognition of learning outcomes is determined by the university senate. However, it is an innovative concept that needs to be tested in practice and followed by possible revisions. At the moment, the HEIs' authorities do not always know how to carry out the recruitment of people who are interested to apply for validation to shorten their studies. It is also difficult to find information about the exact pathway for a person who has undergone the procedure of validating skills acquired outside the higher education system (PAP, 2015).

There is no information on the popularity of MOOCs among Polish students. The issue of using open educational resources, including Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), was briefly raised in the Higher Education Development Programme by 2020. (Part 2: Analysis of higher education). However, it was limited to explaining the phenomenon and noted that Poland is a 'blank spot' when it comes to the formation of the MOOC offer in Europe.

2.3 Validation and the labour market

Various studies carried out before the introduction of the IQS revealed a wide variety of approaches and terminologies and in many cases even inconsistencies, resulting from variations in the legal acts addressing qualifications awarded in non-formal education (as well as in formal education) (Referencing report, 2013). They also exposed a number of various procedures to confirm learning outcomes acquired outside the formal education system, often not regulated in a systematic way (Referencing report, 2013).

The recently implemented IQS is to link the traditional education with learning that takes place in other contexts, e.g. through work, training courses, and self-education. It is also to contribute to the modernisation and better integration of education and training systems with social and economic requirements. The works on the PQF and IQS included considerable participation of representatives of various sectors and led to increased interest in these issues on the labour market. There have been various initiatives to improve procedures and adapt activities related to awarding qualifications. This refers to, inter alia, the formation of

Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks in sectors such as banking, IT, telecommunications, sports and tourism (Referencing report – an update, 2015).

In addition, the market qualifications included in the system are subject to consultation. They are evaluated by specialists representing various stakeholder groups, including a variety of industries and sectors, appointed by ministers that decide on qualifications to include in the IQS. Such qualifications must be described in accordance with the standard of qualifications, which takes into account the requirements for the validation of qualifications. However, the piloting of the IQS has shown that the language used in the validation-related materials poses a major challenge for validation providers (see box below). This applies primarily to the division of validation into phases and also to the possible separation of roles in the process, the distinction between the methods and tools of verification, validation decisions, etc. The consequence of misinterpreting the concepts related to validation is the lack of a clear picture of what validation can offer, which leads to the lack of a framework within which the providers can create their validation projects (IBE Team, 2015).

Piloting the IQS components in the Małopolska region

One of the elements of the IQS' pilot was to test the validation process. It aimed at verifying the process, drawing conclusions, and formulating guidelines for legislative regulations. The following qualifications have been selected for the testing: CNC operator, management coach, property management, pastry in commercial units and management of small teams in cleaning services. They were chosen to differentiate the qualifications in terms of: the level of the PQF; the area in which a qualification is awarded; description of qualifications; validation; volume; and quality assurance. All validation pilots were carried out in accordance with Recommendation of the Council of Europe of 20 December 2012 concerning the validation of non-formal and informal learning and included all four stages for validation process: identification, documentation, evaluation and certification. Each of these steps was subjected to analysis with regards to the specific qualifications and people taking part in it.

The pilot showed the strengths and weaknesses of the proposed solutions and allowed to collect a number of conclusions. Some of them were as follows:

- Vocational counsellors are of great importance for the new system although, from the perspective of validation applicants, validation/industry advisers play a much greater role. It is important that validation/industry advisers are well prepared to work on the submitted documents and know how to assess their quality and usefulness.
- Gathering appropriate documentation and specific evidence proving the mastery of learning outcomes is a time-consuming process. The documents issued by various institutions or employers are often not prepared with due care that indicates the credibility and relevance of the knowledge and skills to learning outcomes specified for a particular qualification.
- Very often the candidates undergoing the process cannot determine – through self-assessment – their competence levels with respect to the functioning standards of competences. They also cannot determine the degree to which they possess the competence, or decide which evidence could prove that they have it. Problems with documenting and with evidence demonstrating the acquisition of learning outcomes are the consequences of the lack of habits and value for such portfolio-based methods.
- The new system arouses considerable distrust among employers, who lack knowledge about it. This is associated with: 1) concerns that employees undergoing the validation process may reveal some company confidential information; 2) the lack of conviction among employers about the benefits of validation; as well as, 3) the perception of validation as a waste of time. It was observed that employers are sometimes not interested in improving the qualifications of their employees, because they pay less to lower-skilled workers and do not want them to leave for another job. This applies particularly to lower-level workers, low-skilled, often working in the 'grey zone'.
- The positive impact on building employers' trust in the system and ensuring the correlation of qualifications with the employers' needs can only be realised by including the industry companies as institutions carrying out validation in collaboration with experienced certification bodies.

In response to these and other challenges, guidelines for the identification and documentation of

the learning outcomes have been elaborated.

Source: Regional Labour Office in Cracow, 2015.

Validation in SMEs: municipal sector in Wielkopolska region

An example of a competence validation project is 'Model validation of competences for employees of SMEs of Wielkopolska municipal sector', developed in 2013. The main objective of the project was to work out innovative validation solutions to support employers and employees of SMEs from municipal sector undergoing adaptation and modernisation processes. The validation model has been designed by the National Chamber of Commerce (KIG) in collaboration with a transnational partner (The European Centre of Employers and Enterprises providing Public services, CEEP).

Within the project, a comprehensive model of validation has been developed by carrying out the following activities:

- designing and implementing mechanisms of accreditation and registration of authorities validating competencies and skills of selected occupations in the Wielkopolska municipal sector;
- creating a database of competences and skills of women in the Wielkopolska municipal sector;
- carrying out the promotion of documenting competences acquired through informal education among executives and managers of the municipal sector; and,
- designing principles and models of validation.

The project target group included executives, managers, supervisors, and employees of SMEs from Wielkopolska municipal sector, who benefited from using validation of competences in authorised institutions. They have also been able to catalogue their competences in order to prepare development plans. Additional support in these actions was provided to women.

The project budget was PLN 1 621 650.00 (EUR 388 215.60).

2.3.1 Skills audits

As reported in 2014 update, skills audits in Poland are carried out under the provisions of regulations on the education system and on the promotion of employment and institutions of the labour market. These fall under two different systems of career counselling. One system is organised within the formal education system, where the tasks associated with skills audits are generally carried out by the school professional counsellors and the psychological and pedagogical guidance services. It should be noted that the school system is aimed primarily at formal education, analysing the achievement of learning outcomes set by the curriculum and special educational needs. The services of school counsellors are open only for students of public and non-public schools. The second guidance system is operated by the district labour offices, where the tasks associated with skills audits are carried out by job counsellors. In this case, the services provided by counsellors are available for unemployed people and jobseekers who are registered with the employment office. This system should be considered more universal than the school system and targeted primarily on the analysis of competences and social skills in demand from employers. As a result of the skills audit, an unemployed person or job seeker receives an action plan including, inter alia, the scope of professional qualifications, skills and competencies that must be completed or acquired in order to find employment. These skills and competencies can be acquired both in the formal, informal and non-formal context. Skills audits can also be carried by the non-public employment agencies on the same basis as in the case of labour offices.

It is also worth mentioning that, as part of the IQS pilot project, vocational counsellors from the Małopolska region tested the balance of competences' method and the tools for identifying and documenting learning outcomes. The main premise of this approach is the use of specific diagnostic tools designed to analyse and broaden the area of conscious self-knowledge of the applicant in terms of possible paths for further development. These tools

include an application form, biographical interview, behavioural interview and balance of competences' card. The outcome of this work was a description of the method and tools for identifying and documenting learning outcomes (IBE Team, 2015).

2.4 Validation and the third sector

Validation in the third sector concerns various projects funded by the EU, sometimes implemented in cooperation with actors representing other organisations and sectors. In part, they are based on generally accepted arrangements and cover more innovative solutions (please see Section 5 on certified NGO trainers). Nevertheless, representatives of the third sector, although active, are not a significant provider of qualifications and their role in the Polish education and training market is limited in this regard. While this sector has no systematic validation arrangements, more durable solutions developed by third sector organisations can be included in the recently introduced Qualification Register. In such a case, the adoption of common, systemic approaches and ensuring coordinating mechanisms is necessary.

Business Academy 50 +

An example of a project for the validation of competence is 'Business Academy 50 +', an innovative model of validation and updating of professional competence of persons aged 50+. This was an innovative pilot project, which ran from May 2012 to September 2014. The project was carried out by the 'Solidarity' Region of Gdańsk (trade union), in partnership with the Foundation for Economy (a non-governmental organisation aimed at the promotion of entrepreneurship, professional development of employees and prevention of unemployment) and ProFirma (a training and consulting company). The aim of the project was to develop and test an innovative model of validation and update the professional competence of persons aged 50 and above in the Pomorskie voivodeship in occupations such as selling and sales representative, in order to improve their adaptability and mobility. The project budget was PLN 1 606 941.91 (EUR 384,755.24). The final product of the project was a complete model of validation and updating of competences, which will consist of:

- assessment of competences;
- individualised feedback on competence gaps;
- development and implementation of an individual professional development process, which corresponds to the diagnosed educational needs; and,
- validation and certification.

There were 60 employed and unemployed people aged 50+ who took part in the testing phase of the project. The validation process was based on a Development Centre methodology – one of the most advanced methods of assessing competences, including interviews, document reviews, tests, and performing practical tasks in a professional environment. Participation in the project was to bring positive results in the area of participants' motivation for professional development.

3 Links to national qualification systems

A comprehensive validation system is the key element of the Integrated Qualifications System introduced in 2016. The Act on IQS includes provisions establishing the Polish Qualifications Framework (PQF), which organises the qualifications included in the system according to individual levels and corresponds to the levels of the EQF. The new legislation also introduced provisions on Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks, which will constitute the extension of PQF in line with the needs of specific sectors (fields of activity).

The IQS covers three groups of qualifications: 1) school and university qualifications (full and partial), 2) regulated qualifications (only partial qualifications) and 3) market/sectorial qualifications (only partial qualifications) – these can be included in the IQS at the request of the relevant operator, provided that they meet the conditions laid down in the legislation.

Qualifications awarded in the general and higher education sectors should have assigned PQF levels. The inclusion of regulated and market qualifications into the IQS as well as assigning the PQF level will be determined by the minister responsible for the given area (Referencing report – un update, 2015).

Works on these solutions were part of the project, ‘The development of terms of reference for the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework and the National Qualifications Register for lifelong learning’, finalised in mid-2015.³ As a part of the project, a system for the validation of learning outcomes acquired outside of the formal system has also been tested and developed. The piloting of the IQS was run by the Educational Research Institute (IBE) in cooperation with the Provincial Labour Office in Krakow. The piloting included testing of validation processes for the selected qualifications. It covered each of the four stages of validation – identification, documentation, assessment and certification – taking into account the specifics of particular qualifications and people taking part in it. Recommendations and guidelines for designing, organising and conducting validation were also prepared under the pilot (The Provincial Labour Office in Cracow, 2015).

The implementation of the PQF closes the cycle of reforms taking place in general, vocational, and higher education sectors (Referencing report – an update, 2015). Prior to these changes, the qualifications system in Poland had been based mainly on standards and criteria addressing the formal education process, defined by the content of education as well as the years of formal learning. The PQF development triggered the transformation of the education system into a learning outcomes-based model. It resulted in the introduction of learning outcomes-based core curricula for general education, learning outcomes-based curricula for VET, and in development of qualification standards for occupations (OJ 2012, item 184). In the higher education sector, the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education has been functioning as of October 2012 together with the definition of learning outcomes for first and second cycle studies for both the general academic and practical profiles.

The process of NQF development also triggered a debate on whether there is a need for an intermediate qualification – at level 5 – in the higher education system. According to a preliminary feasibility study on the introduction of the QF/NQF’s level 5 into the Polish higher education system, there are several benefits that may stem from this innovation, mainly for students and employers. These include: maturity of the decision to study at levels 6 and 7, the need for mid-level specialists and bridging the gap between the competencies of upper secondary school graduates and the requirements of first-year students (The Foundation of Polish Rectors, 2014).

Finally, the implementation of the PQF also gives an impulse for the development of qualifications obtained outside of the formal systems (Referencing report – an update, 2015). This is particularly relevant in Poland, where apart from the education systems, qualifications are also awarded in the context of different structures, institutions and organisations. They operate under different laws or other regulations, established by various entities: corporations, unions, organisations or training institutions (IBE, 2012).

As part of the PQF project, five pilot Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks (SQF) have been developed by expert teams designated by the sectors concerned. According to the IQS, the creation of sectoral qualifications frameworks will remain the domain of the relevant sectors, while the competent ministers will decide about including them into the qualification system or not. This will be possible after comparing the description of SQF’s levels with the characteristics on the PQF levels (Referencing report – an update, 2015).

³ The project was carried out by the Educational Research Institute (IBE) within the framework of the Human Capital Operational Programme.

Finally, the validation framework for VET enables acquiring smaller qualifications (than before), which are made of units of learning outcomes. After the implementation of NQF, it becomes possible to use validation to acquire credits towards a qualification or learning outcomes using ECVET and ECTS. So far, a credit system has been introduced only in higher education (ECTS). A system for credit accumulation and transfer compatible with ECVET principles is currently being developed as an integral part of PQF. The changes introduced in 2012 in VET are in line with the ECVET technical specifications included in the ECVET Recommendation. They specifically concern: using learning outcomes and units of learning outcomes, developing the learning programmes and assessment based on the LO, introducing procedures for credit accumulation and transfer and finally opening the path for validation of non-formal and informal learning.

4 Standards

In the case of Poland, one can talk about several complementary systems of educational and professional standards, which however do not constitute a coherent system. In the case of the general and vocational education system, educational standards are developed in the form of the core curriculum for general education and for individual occupations. The core curriculum is based on learning outcomes. Particular attention should be paid to the curriculum for vocational education, which includes 200 professions taught in the school system divided into 251 separate qualifications. Examination standards used in the Polish Craft Association are prepared on a similar basis as the core curriculum. Qualifications awarded in the school system and in the craft system are treated equally by the law. Higher education constitutes a separate system, for which the educational standards are set out in the form of a Qualifications Framework for Higher Education, which in a rather general way defines learning outcomes appropriate to the different levels of education and different fields of study. Both in the school system and in higher education learning, outcomes are presented in terms of knowledge, skills, and social competences.

Regulated professions are a separate set of 'standards', which however do not form a uniform system. Their common feature is that the role of standard is played by the relevant regulation, which lays down the conditions that must be met in order to obtain the permission to carry out such a profession. In addition to these conditions, the rules also specify the examination procedures and validation rules, provided that it is required under the law.

Finally, there are qualification standards for occupations (now renamed the standards of professional competences), developed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. These standards will be gradually linked to the PQF. The description of vocational qualification requirements does not take into account the ways of acquiring qualifications, other than through formal education and vocational practice (Sztandar-Sztanderska, 2009). The Polish model of standards for vocational qualifications – inspired by the British qualifications system – is based on the concept of five levels of qualifications. The initiatives in this field have been carried out under the PHARE and ESF projects between 1998 and 2013, most recently under the *Human Capital Operational Programme* 'Development and dissemination of national vocational competence standards' in 2011-2013. Through these projects, standards for 553 occupations were developed (out of which, 300 were within the 2011-2013 project) and promoted among employers (initiated and coordinated by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy). While they cover the professions listed in the Polish classification of occupations, they provide more detailed and methodologically unified characteristics of occupational qualifications and competences. They also describe both the activities related to performing a particular profession, as well as required or necessary knowledge, skills, and psychophysical competences. Their application appears to be limited, however, mainly to the institutions of vocational education, as reported in the study on the use of national standards for vocational qualifications. Lack of adequate legal provisions regulating the implementation of standards, problems with interpretation information cited in standards, their complex structure, lack of financial resources to apply them and inconsistency of standards in the

labour market and education system institutions were listed as the key obstacles of full implementation of the standards (The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, 2007).

Regarding the IQS, in order to be included into the Integrated Qualification Register, all qualifications awarded outside the formal education systems have to be described in accordance with the standards of qualifications. The information contained in the description of qualification provides the basis for designing the validation process by institutions that want to award this qualification (Dybaś ed., 2015). The standard's description is presented in the box below (for more information, please see also Section 8).

Standard for describing qualification in the IQS

The entry into force of the Act on the IQS is an attempt to organise the above-mentioned arrangements. In order to be integrated into the new system, all qualifications must be now presented in accordance with a unified standard for describing qualification. When it comes to qualifications awarded outside the general and higher education systems, such a standard specifies the requirements regarding the scope and the presentation of information about regulated and market qualifications, which are incorporated into the IQS. The most important part of this description is the presentation of the learning outcomes required for the qualification, supplemented by conditions for validation that serve as the basis for the designing and conducting of the validation process (Referencing report – un update, 2015). Other elements of the standard description include also: the name of a qualification and of document issued to a person who has obtained it; Polish Qualifications Framework level; reference to sectoral qualifications frameworks (if applicable); an indicative amount of work required to obtain the qualification; a short description of the qualification; the target group and the need for qualification; prospects for employment and further learning; entitlements related to holding a qualification (if applicable); the conditions to obtain a qualification; general characteristics of learning outcomes (and the list of sets of learning outcomes); and, the period of validity of the qualification and terms of its renewal (IBE, 2015).

The description of qualification is a reference point for evaluating the validation processes conducted in various institutions, including the accuracy and reliability of the verification methods. These guidelines address the following issues:

- They specify the minimum standards in the organisation of the process. Depending on the qualification, the requirements for validation may be defined at different levels of detail.
- They are indicated for each set of learning outcomes. They can also refer to the entire qualification and be complemented by additional supporting guidelines.
- They should apply at least to the verification methods, human, organisational and material resources.

Other validation-related requirements in the description of qualifications can include, inter alia, information about the course of validation (phases, time and place), candidates' competences and requirements and the grace period to re-join the process of validation of learning outcomes (IBE Team, 2015).

5 Organisations and institutions involved in validation arrangements and its coordination

Institutional responsibilities stemming from the IQS

There are multiple institutions in charge of overseeing validation practices, depending on the system. These include institutions in the education and craft systems, as well as multiple institutions responsible for 'regulated professions' and non-public organisations covering sectoral qualifications, often similar to qualifications covered by other systems (as further described below and in Section 8 on quality assurance). As for other qualifications not awarded by the state bodies or professional associations, there is also a wide range of validating and certifying institutions. The external supervision over the latter remains rare (Bacia, 2014). The Integrated Qualifications System (IQS) is open to all these institutions

(whether they are public, private or social), provided they fulfill the quality requirements set by the law.

The Act on the IQS specifies the following institutional requirements related to validation and certification of qualifications in the system:

- The new function of a minister coordinator of the IQS is performed by the minister responsible for education. Their tasks include, among others: designing specific organisational and technical solutions for the IQS; supporting the appointment of ministers responsible for particular qualifications; monitoring the functioning of the IQS; providing services to the IQS Stakeholder Council; and, maintaining and disseminating knowledge about the IQS.
- Qualifications included in the IQS can only be awarded by institutions with authority to certify (certifying institutions). The power to certify arises directly from the law or it will be given by the relevant minister in accordance with the provisions on the IQS.
- The function of quality assuring the work of certifying institutions will be entrusted to an entitled entity by the minister responsible for the particular qualification. The list of entities entitled to carry out external quality assurance will be maintained by the minister coordinating the IQS.
- The processes of validation and certification of regulated and 'market'⁴ qualifications included in the IQS are to be supervised by the competent ministers.
- The IQS Stakeholder Council operates as a consultative and advisory body under the minister coordinator of the IQS. It is composed of representatives of socio-economic organisations, local government, the programme council for the competence matters and the ministry coordinating the IQS. The law specifies the composition of the Stakeholder Council, the rules for appointing its members, the duration of their term of office, the principle of selecting the President of the Council and the way it operates.

Polish Qualifications Framework comprises of several groups of level descriptors: universal, typical for a selected type of learning (general, higher, vocational), which are introduced through the by-laws prepared by the Minister of Education and the Minister of Science and Higher Education. For instance, when it comes to Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks, they can also be included into the IQS at the initiative of the relevant minister or an interested party, if the preliminary assessment of purposefulness of such inclusion is positive. The minister in charge of education adds the Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks to the IQR at the request of the competent minister.

The Polish Agency for Enterprise Development (PARP) is responsible for operating the Integrated Qualifications Register (IQR) and entering the qualifications included in the IQS into the register (recording). Initially, the IQR will contain only qualifications (full and partial) from formal education and, gradually, it will be expanded to cover market qualifications. All qualifications will be included in the register after their authorisation by a public authority (e.g. a competent minister) or a legally authorised entity (Referencing Report, 2013).⁵ The register is operational since 15 July 2016. The information gathered in the IQR will be available through an Internet portal. The IQS Portal, as is the case with similar portals in other EU countries, will be linked to the European Qualifications Framework portal.

Governance and allocation of responsibilities

⁴ 'Market' qualifications – partial qualifications, not regulated by law, awarded through the decision of the minister responsible for the specific area, based on the principle of freedom of economic activity.

⁵ Some qualifications are included in the IQR on the grounds of law (in formal education). As for regulated or market qualifications, they are included after their authorisation by a public authority.

As previously explained in the 2010 and 2014 updates, responsibility for the Polish vocational education system is shared across several ministries. The Ministry for National Education is responsible for the definition and renewal of qualification standards in vocational education and training. The Ministry of Education is also in charge of the quality and organisation of vocational education in general, but the core curricula (*podstawa programowa kształcenia w zawodzie*) are prepared in consultation with the respective Ministries for the particular vocational field (e.g. the Ministry of Health is responsible for standards in medical professions).

The current procedures for validation in VET are governed by the Minister of National Education, and in HE, by the Minister of Science and Higher Education. In VET, responsibilities are divided between District Examination Boards (responsible for validation and issuing certificates), directors of vocational schools (validation of partial learning outcomes) and chambers of Trade, responsible for the whole process of validation and issuing certificates in a system carried out by the Polish Craft Association. Four areas of validation in the Vet sector can be distinguished, together with various bodies that are responsible for them:

- the Central Examination Board (*Centralna Komisja Egzaminacyjna*, CKE) and eight District Examination Boards (*Okręgowa Komisja Egzaminacyjna*, OKE) in charge of examinations confirming vocational qualifications in the formal education system;
- the Chambers of crafts supervised by the Polish Craft Association that carry out master and journeyman exams, which are treated as a part of formal system of vocational education;
- Sectoral organisations/branch associations (e.g. Accountants' Association, Polish Federation of Engineering Associations, the Association of Polish Electricians), which organise training, exams and certification; and,
- Institutions/organisations that carry out validation of informal and non-formal learning through various, often ESF-funded, projects.

In addition, a growing number of corporate practices involving validation are emerging, usually in the most innovative sectors of the economy. Certificates confirming qualifications to operate the products of specific companies, often multinational corporations operating in the IT market like IBM, Microsoft and Cisco, have become widely recognised and respected by employers.

As for adult continuing education, several levels of state administration are in charge, with the key bodies responsible at the central level for the institutional framework for VET and HE including validation, as follows:

- The Minister for National Education, whose competences include formulation of policies concerning education, including general rules of validation of non-formal and informal learning;
- The Minister for Labour and Social Policy, who lays down conditions and procedures for attending training and other forms of vocational activation by unemployed people and job seekers;
- The Minister for Science and Higher Education, who is responsible for administration, preparation and implementation of the strategy and policies for the development of higher education and the area of recognition of education and qualifications (including rules of validation in HE);
- The Minister for Finance, who proposes the budget assumptions for a given budget year and tax allowances (Cedefop, 2011).

In higher education, validation and certification are carried out by the HEIs under the supervision of the minister in charge of science and higher education. The Polish Accreditation Commission is responsible for external quality assurance.

Education and training providers

As explained in the 2014 update, the Polish system of validation and assessment of learning outcomes covers internal and external types of validation. While internal assessment is carried out by school teachers against the requirements which are defined by them on the basis of curricula, external validation is organised by the Central Examination Board (*Centralna Komisja Egzaminacyjna*, CKE) and eight District Examination Boards (*Okręgowa Komisja Egzaminacyjna*, OKE). On a non-obligatory formal education level, both CKE and OKE are responsible for the following types of examinations:

- matriculation exam (*matura*) when completing the upper secondary school level (lyceum and technical school – ISCED level 3);
- examinations confirming vocational qualifications conducted in occupations that are included in the classification of vocational occupations (these exams have both a theoretical and a practical part – ISCED level 3); and,
- extra-mural exams for adults who may obtain graduation certificates from schools (on ISCED 1-3) without having to attend school in order to do so.

The latter type of examination can be considered as one of the key elements of the developing system of validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, as there is no requirement to attend school in order to attain the certificate (OJ 2012 item 188). Among other steps towards the validation system, the following examples could be also listed:

- exemption from external national exams on the basis of achievements in national and international students' Olympiads and school subject contents;
- the system of exams for journeymen and masters organised by the Polish Craft Association;
- implementation in 2012 of the external exams acknowledging vocational qualifications of individuals who are not graduates of vocational schools;
- improving the external exams system with the aim of using them in the validation process (The Ministry of National Education, 2009).

In relation to continuing vocational training (CVT), particularly worth highlighting are the Continuing Education Centres (*Centrum Kształcenia Ustawicznego*, CKU), which provide key educational, examination and commercial services within the system. As multifunctional public education facilities, they offer education, further education and training to adults, in both in-school and out-of school forms (including the organisation of extra-mural examinations). The CKUs also play an important role in terms of providing training courses, commissioned by labour offices, and advisory services for teachers and trainers involved in adult education, as well as in preparing and implementing modern curricula and methods in adult education. Alongside CKUs, non-public Vocational Training Centres (*Zakład Doskonalenia Zawodowego*, ZDZ) and public Practical Training Centres (*Centrum Kształcenia Praktycznego*, CKP) and Centres for Education and Professional Development (*Ośrodek Doskonalenia i Doskonalenia Zawodowego*, ODDZ) can organise and provide continuing education on a regular daily basis, in the extra-mural form and as distance learning (FRSE, 2012). In 2013, there were 166 Continuing Education Centres, 152 Practical Training Centres, 75 Centres for Education and Professional Development and 24 Vocational Training Centres operating all over the country.⁶ These organisations provide training which adults can have validated through the external or extra-mural examinations.

Private sector actors (including social partners)

⁶ <http://new.koweziu.edu.pl/cku-ckp>; http://www.zzdz.pl/index.php?file=Subpage&subpage_id=64

As outlined in the 2014 update, one of the long-established practices of validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning in private sectors in Poland is the training and examination for craftsmen and candidates for particular certificates in craftsmanship. The 1989 Crafts Act (OJ 1989 No. 17 item 92 with subsequent amendments) stipulates the conditions for carrying out examinations for craftsmen for the certificate of journeyman and master in crafts, which is recognised by employers and State administration at a national level. These examinations can be taken by both young people who have completed vocational education and training and adults wishing to validate their knowledge and skills acquired through work and theoretical training (the latter must have as a minimum a general education certificate at ISCED level 1 or 2) (OJ 2012 item 1117). The openness and accessibility of this track of examination for these two groups has been lately introduced into exams carried out by OKE, which corresponds in a way to validation of informal and non-formal learning.

Also, in the case of certain occupations (e.g. security worker, engineers and technical staff in the electrical power sector, work safety and hygiene technicians and officers), responsibility for validation is delegated to the relevant sectoral bodies and professional associations. They issue and deliver state-recognised certificates following training and examinations organised within the respective occupation or craft (PRISMA, 2007). Furthermore, in some industries, special standards are set and work-based learning courses are easily recognised by other enterprises across the sector (e.g. in the banking, IT or construction sectors).

An example of a certification system in the IT sector is presented in a box below.

The European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL)

The ECDL certificate can be earned in 148 countries around the world and in one of 41 languages. The validation process is standardised and subject to quality assurance procedures. Rules for obtaining a certificate are determined by the ECDL Foundation of Ireland. In Poland, the certification process oversees Polish IT Society (PTI).

The learning outcomes required to obtain individual certificates are included in the ECDL syllabus available on the websites of the ECDL Foundation and all national operators, including PTI. The exams consist of a written test checking level of theoretical knowledge and a practical exam, aimed at a practical skills check.

Candidates take exams in ECDL authorised laboratories. Currently there are more than 1 000 laboratories in Poland grouped in about 100 Examination Centres. The quality of these institutions is supervised by the Commission for the Quality of PTI, which verifies the conditions of the examinations in these institutions. If the conditions provided by the institutions are in accordance with the ECDL standards, the annual accreditation is granted.

Starting in 2013, a new form of certificates has been introduced, reflecting the technological changes and new requirements of the labour market. Key changes include increased flexibility of the programme, better adapted to the model of life-long learning and a greater range of certification modules. Greater flexibility of the programme is obtained by introducing the concept of the ECDL Profile that allows candidates to build a certification path that best suits their own needs or the needs of their employers. This way one can validate those skills that best fit the professional or educational profile. The new ECDL modules introduce three groups of modules, and additional modules: e-citizen (module for beginners) and EPP modules (Endorsed Product Programme), which (in Poland) include e-teacher, e-Officer and GIS. ECDL certificate profiles can contain any mixture of these modules, as long as there is at least one optional module BASE, STANDARD or ADVANCED.

Source: <https://ecdpl.pl/content/o-ecdpl>

Third sector organisations

As noted in the 2010 and 2014 updates, the third sector in Poland is rather active in taking the initiative towards the validation of informal and non-formal learning. There are various certificates offered by third sector organisations (e.g. in voluntary work), however, they are not official and thus not recognised by the state. An example of such a certificate is presented in the box below.

Certified NGO trainers (STOP)

Members of the NGO Trainers Association can validate coaching competences in the field of planning and conducting training. Candidates may apply for a certificate at levels I, II or III. For each certificate requirements are defined, including a list of competences needed to acquire the relevant qualification level.

A person wishing to join the process of validation should complete a questionnaire, in which he or she describes coaching experience and gives the number of successful and completed trainings.

The most important step in the validation process is to provide training under supervision. The supervisor assesses both the training programme and the way it was carried out. After the supervision, the supervisor prepares the note and recommendation for the certification committee, which in case of doubt may ask the candidate for further clarification. To avoid irregularities in the validation process, the NGO Trainers Association has established standards of supervision.

The main objective of supervision is to support trainers in developing coaching skills. Additionally, in the process of certification, the supervision is aimed at:

- confirmation that the coach applying for a quality certificate of training can independently prepare and lead a workshop according to the requirements for the given certificate degree and prepare a summary of the workshop; and,
- checking the coaching competence set up in the Letter of Competence appropriate to each level of STOP certificate.

The supervision process includes:

- an introductory session, where a contract with a trainer is signed, assumptions and outline of the training is discussed and feedback is delivered to the candidate;
- a participatory session, where the supervisor takes part in a workshop carried out by the candidate, assessing by direct observation the coaching work; and,
- a closing session, where the training supervisor provides feedback to the candidate, in particular on the competencies required for the given level certificate.

Source: <http://www.stowarzyszeniestop.pl/>

6 Information, advice and guidance

6.1 Awareness-raising and recruitment

As described in the 2014 update, at a project level the validation process usually addresses a specific group of people with experience in certain areas (e.g. in baking, construction, etc.) and the recruitment process is supported by promotion in the press, radio, television and social media. The validation process is usually preceded by instructions on the procedure, the conditions of recruitment, location and time of a course and the principles of successful completion. The organiser of the validation process also provides relevant information and instructions related to the exam and certification.

In the case of the validation of informal learning carried out by the chambers of crafts and Regional Examination Boards, the recruitment process is based on: information posted on the websites of the validating institutions; and, information provided by the teachers, trainers and professional counsellors (working with labour market agencies) and by school professional counsellors.

However, direct contact with potential ‘possessors’ of specific skills identified by the training institutions operating in the regions are considered as the most important means of raising awareness and recruitment. Hence, long-term functioning of VET institutions in a local or regional labour market is the most effective form of recruitment or promotion of validation.

Various forms of recruiting applicants and promoting validation, such as industry portals, websites of institutions, social networking, flyers, posters, press advertisements and direct marketing, have been used in the IQS pilot. The most effective of these methods was direct marketing linked to the transfer of information materials. This may be due to the fact that the validation of competences is a new concept associated with difficult and often incomprehensible language. The pilot has also shown that it is important to direct the promotion activities toward employers to show them the benefits of investing in qualified employees. Otherwise, without adequate information, they may inhibit their employees from undertaking the validation procedure (IBE Team, 2015).

6.2 Information, advice and guidance

At the current stage, similarly to the situation described in the previous updates, these aspects of validation are still a fairly new element in the Polish educational system that requires on-going dissemination activities. In the preliminary guidelines for conducting the validation process within the IQS, it was proposed that vocational counsellors should act as promoters of the system who inform, educate and support people interested to apply for the validation procedure. This is particularly important given the difficulties with the terminology concerning the validation of learning outcomes, as reported by the implementers of the validation pilots as a barrier for success of this process. Meetings with the vocational counsellor have been advised as particularly important for validation participants from the disadvantaged groups so as to motivate them to start the process by diagnosing competences and motivating them for further action (IBE Team, 2015).

Within the school system, each student has the possibility to get additional support from professionals such as a teacher, a methodical adviser, a psychologist and a professional counsellor. Outside the school system, support is targeted at unemployed people and jobseekers registered at employment offices or in non-public employment agencies. In other situations, individuals have to organise guidance and support on their own and with their own funds. Some useful information is also available on the Internet portal of the Central Examination Board, Polish Craft Association and Voluntary Labour Corps.⁷

6.3 Measures to enhance the awareness of validation initiatives and practices amongst guidance practitioners

The issue of improving awareness of validation amongst guidance practitioners is directly linked to educational reforms and the implementation of the IQS and the Polish Qualifications Framework. Counsellors are to play a vital role and carry out important tasks in these developments, especially in the early stages of the validation process – the identification and documentation of learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning. Therefore, several dozen seminars for educational and vocational counsellors have been organised by the Institute for Educational Research from 2012 to 2015. In addition to issues related to the EQF and the PQF, they addressed methods for validation of acquired learning outcomes (portfolio) and quality assurance procedures for qualifications (Bacia, 2014).

⁷ The Voluntary Labour Corps (OHP) is a state organisation. The primary objective of OHP is to create adequate conditions for proper social and vocational development of young people, including special actions that are targeted at disadvantaged youth, who are supported by OHP and such support derives from organisations of various forms involved in the key issues of tackling poverty, unemployment, and social pathology effects.

Other main means of dissemination of the relevant information are publications, seminars and internet portals of the Ministry of National Education, the Central Examination Board, the National Centre for Supporting Vocational and Continuing Education (KOWEziU)⁸ and the Centre for Education Development⁹. In the case of job counsellors working in employment offices, the main source of information is the Internet portal of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and the Portal of Public Employment Services. Individual employment offices and non-public employment agencies can also provide guidance and training for guidance practitioners on the topic of validation, but it is not a systemic solution.

7 Validation practitioners

7.1 Profile of validation practitioners

The vast majority of examiners who are entitled to conduct the validation of learning outcomes are from either the formal education system or the craft system. In the case of examiners appointed by Regional Examination Boards (formal education system), almost all are vocational teachers and instructors of practical training. In the case of examiners from craft chambers, they are predominantly entrepreneurs and practitioners, often acting as vocational and academic teachers and instructors of practical training as well. In the case of other non-formal and informal learning practices, examiners are usually authorised representatives of the given profession, as in the case of the regulated professions.

In line with the works on the IQS, organisational resources, including human resources, should be part of validation requirements, which constitute one of the most important elements of the qualification description. Among the persons involved in the validation procedure, the key role is played by assessors who bear the responsibility for assessment of candidates' learning outcomes. The recommended competency profile for an assessor includes:

- knowledge of validation process;
- a detailed knowledge of the course of validation (individual stages, procedures, requirements) for the qualification awarded in the institution;
- the knowledge and understanding of learning outcomes, criteria and verification methods;
- professional experience in a given industry, which are related to the learning outcomes for a qualification;
- experience in evaluating learning outcomes;
- the ability to use tools and methods for verification;
- a detailed knowledge of formal evaluation criteria and content;
- the ability to work with the candidate (no prejudices, giving feedback, communication skills, impartiality); and,
- confirmed competence in the range of tasks they perform.

⁸ KOWEziU is a central, public, national-level institution providing professional development services for teachers subject to the Ministry of National Education. The mission of the Centre is to inspire, prepare and coordinate activities related to professional development of teachers from vocational schools and schools for adults and to prepare and execute educational ventures related to the stages of educational transformation in Poland.

⁹ The Centre for Education Development (ORE) is a national teacher training institution. The main objectives of the Centre include: actions for quality assurance in education, particularly through supporting schools and educational institutions in carrying out their statutory tasks; and, support of changes in the system of education in the field of teachers' professional development.

In addition, assessors should be characterised by openness to different ways of documenting learning outcomes and to different ways of completion of tasks by the validation applicants to verify learning outcomes. It is also recommended to maintain databases of assessors from the industry.

Other persons that can be involved in the validation process include validation advisors, counsellors, coordinators, external observers, and persons designing the validation process, responsible for its improvement, preparing the necessary tools to implement validation and responsible in the certifying authority for internal quality assurance process. Information about the human resources contained in the description of qualification may concern: their functions in the process; competence requirements for these functions; the rules of selection of people involved in the process of validation; method of verification and/or monitoring of people involved in validation; and, the rules for updating and/or improving the skills of those involved in this process (IBE Team, 2015).

7.2 Qualification requirements

Outside of general education, particularly in the field of 'regulated occupations', which have their conditions specified in the legal acts, it is necessary to hold a relevant entitlement (specific for various professions) to become a member of an examination committee. For instance, the information about training for people who would like to obtain a driving licence for a tram can be found in the Regulation of the Minister of Infrastructure of 27 October 2005 on the training, examination and certification for vehicle drivers, instructors and examiners.¹⁰

In the case of projects concerning validation of non-formal competences, the organisational support for the process can be provided by experienced trainers from organisations where adult and youth education is a statutory activity. The examination committees usually consist of respected experts and professionals from the industry, long-time practitioners, representatives of employers and academia and the specific field, as well as members of external examination commissions confirming vocational skills through formal education. More specifically, the examination committee members should usually satisfy the following requirements and possess:

- knowledge of qualification standards in the given profession;
- knowledge of health and safety regulations, especially with regards to the specificity of the profession; and,
- knowledge of responsibilities in the workplace on a given position.

In addition to the above, other requirements are often desirable:

- practical experience in assessing knowledge and skills;
- practical experience in the profession;
- experience from other examination commissions; and,
- representing a well-known sectoral, education or training institution that is respected in the labour market.

It should be noted however that these requirements are mandatory only for the validation practitioners taking part in a specific project. As for qualification requirements for validation practitioners in the formal education system – who can be involved in validating competences acquired also outside the formal education system – they are specified in the Educational System Act of 7 September 1991 (OJ 2004 No. 257 item 2572 with subsequent

¹⁰ Information on regulated professions can be found at:
http://www.nauka.gov.pl/g2/oryginal/2013_05/2fc90959252ab275bd526f0254718d89.pdf (accessed in 2013).

amendments). According to article 9c, paragraph 4, a person who wants to become an examiner who conducts an examination, confirming vocational qualifications should:

- have qualifications required for appointment as a school teacher in the examined qualification or a university teacher specialising in the areas which fall within the scope of the examination;
- have at least three years of teaching experience in a public or private school or higher school, or at least three years' experience in a position requiring teaching qualifications in the teachers education institution, the public authority, the school-board or authority conducting pedagogical supervision;
- meet the conditions set out in article 19, paragraph 10.5, points 2-4 of the Act of 26 January 1982 on the Teacher's Charter (e.g. full legal capacity and public rights, no pending criminal or disciplinary proceedings or incapacitation, not punished for an intentionally committed crime); and
- successfully finish a training course for examiners, organised by a District Examination Board, completed with the knowledge of the principles for conducting and evaluating tests and exams.

A person who meets the following criteria can also work as an examiner carrying out the qualification examination in the profession, i.e.:

- is a representative of employers or an employers' organisation or professional association;
- has qualifications required for the apprenticeship instructor and a minimum of three years of experience in the examined profession;
- meets the conditions set out in article 19, paragraph 10. 5, points 2-4 of the Act of 26 January 1982 on the Teacher's Charter; and,
- successfully finishes a training course for examiners, organised by a District Examination Board.

In the case of members of the examination committee appointed by the craft chambers, the requirements for examiners include:

- Chairman of the examination committee: higher education and six years of professional experience in the given profession, in the case of unique occupations requirements are as follows:
 - upper secondary education and master diploma with three years of professional experience, or
 - upper secondary education and technician diploma with six years of professional experience, or
 - basic vocational education, master diploma with six years of professional experience.
- Members of the examination committee:
 - basic vocational education and master diploma with three years of professional experience, or
 - upper secondary education and technician diploma with six years of professional experience, or
 - entry in the register of examiners in accordance with the principles laid down in the Education System Act (same as in the case of examiners appointed by the Regional Examination Boards).

All members of the examination committees (including the chair) must have pedagogical training (at least the title of practical training instructor) and have completed training for

members of the committee. In addition, members of the examination committee cannot be members of the statutory authority of the craft chamber which carry out particular examinations and cannot maintain any legal or factual connection with the candidate that may raise justifiable doubts as to impartiality.

7.3 Provision of training and support to validation practitioners

As explained in 2014 update, a formalised system of support for examiners is organised within the school system (mandatory courses for examiners conducted by Regional Examination Boards), the craft system (mandatory training for members of the examination committees led by the chambers of crafts) and the system of regulated professions, where the type of training for examiners is determined in each case by law for each specific regulated profession. The situation is different in the case of validation projects where training for examiners is either run by the project contractor or (which is a more typical situation) the project involves professional examiners from school or craft systems.

8 Quality assurance

As mentioned in the previous updates, the issue of quality in validation has gained considerable attention over the past few years. It was a key concern about the implementation of educational reform and the implementation of the PQF and IQS. All this bore fruits in specific provisions on quality assurance arrangements that have been encompassed in the new law on the IQS.

Ensuring the quality of qualifications awarded within the IQS is based on quality assurance of the qualification's description (described also in Section 4), validation of learning outcomes, and certification. As specified in the legislation, all institutions conferring qualifications included in the IQS will be subject to ongoing internal and periodic external quality assurance, supervised by the responsible minister. The responsibility for designing, carrying out and improving of the quality assurance system rests with the certifying authorities that issue documents confirming qualification. The following are subject of evaluation: the validation and certification processes, the related process of customer service, as well as the functioning of all entities involved in awarding qualifications (IBE Team, 2015).

The overriding goal of assuring quality of awarding qualifications in the IQS is to ensure that the certificates are issued to the people who actually obtained the learning outcomes required for the qualification. This means that the learning outcomes required for a given qualification are validated (accuracy) and that the result of the validation process is independent of place, time, methods and persons conducting the validation (reliability). The key concept of quality assurance is also a continuous improvement process for awarding qualifications (Dybaś, 2015; IBE Team, 2015).

The internal quality assurance system serves as a tool that links and coordinates the activities for quality assurance. The purpose of the internal quality assurance system is to ensure the correctness and improvement of validation and certification, which is to be achieved by: 1) the use of solutions to ensure adequate separation of the education and training from the validation processes; 2) continuous monitoring and ongoing assessment of validation and certification; and, 3) periodic internal evaluation of validation and certification. Moreover, ensuring the quality of awarded qualifications should be an integral part of this system covering all the activities of the institution. In doing so, the internal quality assurance:

- engages all persons with influence on the process of awarding qualifications;
- should be carried out in a formalised, systematic and continuous manner;
- is developed and adapted to the needs of institutions and processes conducted by it;

- focuses not only on individual processes, but draws attention to the inter-dependence between the processes and the transition between them; and,
- looks at the process of awarding a qualification as a whole, bearing in mind its effect, i.e. the qualifications awarded to individuals.¹¹

The certifying authority carries out internal evaluation for each 'market'¹² qualification it is entitled to certify, at least once every three years. The subsequent report from such evaluation is to be submitted to the external quality assurance body and to the operator of the Integrated Qualifications Register (IQR). The documents should comprise:

- the analysis of the documentation on validation and certification;
- the evaluation of validation methods in terms of their compliance with the requirements concerning validation included in the description of a given qualification, as well as the accuracy of methods and criteria applied;
- information about activities towards improving the validation and certification methods; and,
- information on measures to improve the internal quality assurance system.

The **external quality assurance** of validation and certification processes is carried out by an entity conducting organised activities in the area of economy, labour market, education, or training.¹³ It must first be included in the list of entities authorised to act as an external assurance body. Such functions are entrusted by the minister responsible for the qualification. The list of authorised entities will be maintained by the minister coordinating the IQR and publicised on the website of the Integrated Qualification System.

In line with the IQS, external quality assurance concerns both the certifying authority with its internal quality assurance system as well as the validation and awarding qualifications processes. Its main elements include verification of compliance and external evaluation aimed at assessing the effectiveness of the processes and their improvement (Dybaś ed., 2015).

Not less frequently than once every five years, the external quality assurance body will prepare a report on the certifying authority that contains, inter alia: i) the analysis of validation and certification processes; ii) the description of irregularities (if found); and, iii) recommendations on changes to improve the quality of validation and certification carried out by the certification institution. This report should be immediately submitted to the certifying authority and to the entity managing the Integrated Register of Qualifications. Conclusions from the external evaluations of individual certification institutions are to be presented every three years to the ministers responsible for the government administration departments.

In addition, the rules for Ministers carrying out inspections of the certification institutions and external quality assurance bodies have also been introduced. Also, the situations in which the ministers can apply sanctions provided for in the Law have been defined, including the withdrawal of permission to certification and the deletion from the list of external quality assurance entities (Referencing report – an update, 2015).

¹¹ As shown by the IQS pilot, the understanding of the quality assurance principles and translating them into the internal quality assurance system and procedures caused difficulties in designing the validation process. Accordingly, in some cases, it was found that the quality assurance system designed under the pilot by some companies has not proven to be a durable solution, integrated with the company management, which therefore cannot guarantee the quality of issued certificates in the future.

¹² 'Market' qualifications – partial qualifications, not regulated by law, awarded by a decision of the minister responsible for the specific area, based on the principle of freedom of economic activity.

¹³ With respect to the chambers of craft, the external quality assurance is performed by the Polish Craft Association.

It should also be mentioned that as a result of educational reforms that took place a few years ago, the methodology for the validation process has already been developed for certain professions, together with corresponding quality requirements to ensure the credibility of the certificates. These measures could also be applied to other vocational areas. The quality requirements for the process of validating informal competences tend to result from the compliance with the quality policy applied by a certain institution carrying out the validation process.

In the school system, the quality assurance provisions of validation of learning outcomes are supervised by the Central Examination Board and in the case of a validation process, by Regional Examination Boards. The quality assurance systems consist of formal requirements for the examiners, rules of work for the examination committee and procedures for conducting examinations. External examinations are carried out on the basis of the curriculum for vocational education, including 251 separate qualifications extracted from 200 occupations. This is in accordance with the principles set out in the regulation of the Minister of National Education of 24 February 2012 amending the regulation on rules and conditions of assessment, grading and promotion of pupils and students and conducting tests and examinations in public schools (OJ 2012 item 262).

In the case of craft examinations, the same quality assurance procedures are applied to both journeyman and master's diplomas. The requirements for examination committee members to possess certain formal qualifications are seen as a means of quality assuring the validation process. The committee members are appointed for a term of four years. After the appointment, members of the committee take part in training organised by craft chambers concerning the examination methodology, procedural rules, the committee's work and the conduct of exams. According to the principle of external examinations, exams take place outside the company in which the candidate works and his/her trainer (in the case of the craft system also an employer) cannot take part in the examination committee. The exams are based on uniform examination standards. In addition to the standards, regular meetings of chairs of the examination committees are organised, aimed at establishing a common range of examination topics, setting practical tasks, sets of theoretical questions etc.

Finally, as for the evaluation of individual projects financed by the ESF, these are evaluated on a regular basis. The minimal requirement for such a project is an ex-post evaluation and in the case of larger projects, there is also a requirement to carry out an ex-ante and ongoing evaluation. For school-based education, a systemic internal and external evaluation is carried out on a regular basis, but this process does not concern the validation process, which is organised by the Regional Examination Boards.

It is worth mentioning that, in the IQS, the description of qualifications is the foundation of internal and external evaluation, particularly in the part concerning the requirements for validation (see Section 4).

9 Inputs, outputs and outcomes

9.1 Funding

As listed in previous updates, resources for the validation of non-formal learning may come from:

- state and local government budgets which are being used to fund education,
- special-purpose funds: e.g. the Labour Fund, State Fund for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons,
- programmes supporting vocational activity of people with disabilities,
- foreign assistance funds – i.e. World Bank loans,
- European Structural Funds,

- enterprises,
- individual's own funds.

Generally, validation processes carried out within VET and HE are financed from the state budget, Labour Fund or State Fund for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons. Validation carried out outside of VET and HE is financed from the other sources in the above list.

Particularly worth highlighting are the operational programmes (OPs) financed from ESF such as the Human Capital OP (2007-2013) and new Knowledge, Education, Development OP (2014-2020). They have contributed to boosting different forms of non-formal and informal learning, as well as continuing educational courses for various groups of participants that developed as part of projects carried out under those programmes. These initiatives are generally free of charge for participants. The human and technical resources required for their implementation are usually financed both by EU funds and the project partners who provide their contribution in the form of non-cash assets and resources (Refernet, 2009). It should be mentioned that the systemic projects concerning the development of validation system are financed by the ESF. As for the sectoral exams, they are usually financed by the applicants, who can apply for the reimbursement of the examination fee at the labour offices, provided they are registered as unemployed or as a jobseeker. Employers, who hire a person through the labour offices, can also apply for the reimbursement of the examination fee of the new worker.

9.2 Distribution of costs

There are no studies regarding the costs generated by the validation process to organisations or individuals in Poland. In general, education at schools, where public administration (at any level, in case of VET either district or voivodeship) is the leading authority, is financed from state budgets. Also the external examination is free of charge, although travel costs and accommodation of those undertaking the exam are not subsidised. In the case of non-public schools, the learners are obliged to pay for the tuition. In the case of the examination held by the Polish Craft Association, it is either financed by the learner or by public funds at the disposal of local authorities. As for the training organised by the public employment services (district labour offices), the beneficiaries of such education are not charged. Likewise, an employer whose staff training is supported by labour offices, does not have to pay the tuition fees, although not all labour offices offer this type of training.

Outside the school system, education is financed either from funds generated by the project – in most cases financed from ESF – by the employer or from students' own financial resources.

It should be noted that there are no special tax incentives for organisations or individuals. Moreover, as argued in some studies, the costs of undertaking validation procedures, including participation fees, are one of the main barriers to expand the scope of validation (Bacia, 2014).

9.3 Evidence of benefits to individuals

Building on the experience of validation projects, it can be said that a key benefit to individuals of participating in a validation initiative is an opportunity to confirm their skills and obtain a certificate without bearing any costs. Other important factors include the possibility to increase employment opportunities, a positive impact on the participants' self-esteem and fulfilling their desire to improve their competences. It can therefore be concluded that the validation of competences helps to stimulate the need for further education among participants. At the same time, the employers involved in the projects have easy access to people who declared their willingness to be employed having successfully validated their competences.

Some interesting data on benefits to individuals can be extracted from the report of the GUS on participation in non-formal training. According to the research results, the most important reason among the respondents for participating in training is to improve the quality of their work or career development (60.4 %). This objective was largely achieved, as evidenced by benefits received by participants undertaking non-formal education. The most frequently cited example of benefits for participants was improvement of job performance (45.6 % of the participants). Among other benefits associated with work, respondents indicated the inclusion of new duties (13.4 %), an increase in salary (4.4 %) and promotion (2.0 %). Women more frequently than men pointed out the benefits in private life (25.6% compared with 18.2 % of men). Comparing the urban area with rural areas it can be said, respondents from cities said that training more frequently contributed to better job performance (47.8 % compared to 39.7 % village inhabitants) and other work-related benefits (for example: obtaining a new job, career advancement, higher salary, take up of new duties). Answers given by respondents indicate that often the main motive for undertaking learning activities was obtaining a certificate. It should be pointed out that more than 71 % of the respondents obtained a certificate after completion of the course. For almost half of the respondents the certification was required by the employer or by law (Central Statistical Office, 2011).

9.4 Beneficiaries and users of validation processes

9.4.1 Validation trends

According to data provided by the Central Examination Board, in the case of the school sector, there has been an increase of 11 % in the number of students/applicants taking the vocational exam (this includes learners who have undertaken both formal (school) and non-formal (extra-mural) learning) from 230 267 graduates in 2010 to 255 874 graduates in 2013.

Current arrangements for validation concern mainly VET system, including: school and craft systems, and the system of vocational training for adults provided by the employment offices. These groups are the main “clients” of the Polish VET system.

9.4.2 Validation users

There is no systematic and comprehensive statistical data available regarding the situation (including that of beneficiaries) of non-formal and informal learning in Poland. However, based on the information available from the aforementioned examples of validation projects, it appears that there is moderate demand for validation of non-formal and informal learning within the professions targeted by these projects. It should also be noted that these projects usually cover rather small groups of individuals, compared to the number of graduates of vocational schools (around 170 000 annually) (Central Examination Board, 2013) or graduates from the craft system (50 000 examinations annually) (The Polish Craft Association). To give an example: 60 candidates signed up for the ‘Business Academy 50+’ - an innovative model of validation and updating of professional competence of persons 50+’ project and received a formal confirmation of their competences.

According to the report published by the Central Examination Board in 2013 (the first year in which the examinations were carried out on the basis of the new core curriculum for vocational education) the qualifications diploma (which is awarded to people who pass the external or extra-mural examinations) received 60.03 % of all the candidates who take part in the vocational exam. On average, the theoretical vocational exam was passed by 88 % of candidates, while the practical part was passed by 66 % of candidates. Over the period 2010-2013 there has been an increase of 11 % in the number of students/applicants taking the vocational exam (this includes learners who have undertaken both formal (school) and non-formal (extra-mural) learning), from 230 267 graduates in 2010 to 255 874 graduates in 2013. It is worth mentioning that in the case of candidates taking the new examination in the extra-mural form, the pass rate was 100 % (Central Examination Board, 2013).

When it comes to vocational extra-mural examinations (conducted in May-July), the following trends can be observed over 2013-2015 period:

- The number of persons taking the exams almost doubled from 497 in 2013 to 853 in 2015. In 2014, there were as many as 1 038 exam participants.
- The success rate remains relatively stable at 83.35 % in 2015 compared to 81.79% in 2014 and 85.71 % in 2013 (Central Examination Commission, 2013, 2014, 2015).

With regard to the crafts examinations, data has been published separately since 2010 by each craft chamber which delivers VET. It is not possible within the scope of this report to prepare aggregate figures but it is estimated that the pass rate of the vocational examination in the crafts system is around 90 % (The Polish Craft Association, 2010).

9.4.3 Validation and migrants / refugees and other disadvantaged groups

In the case of individual validation projects, the arrangements are targeting specific disadvantaged groups, such as low-qualified, unemployed people, disabled people, early school leavers etc. In the case of national arrangements, there is no specific targeting apart from certain arrangements described below.

Special procedures to confirm the educational qualifications levels of refugees

Refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection have access to all levels of education and full access to the Polish labour market.¹⁴ If they do not possess the relevant certificates due to specific hardships related to their situation, they can apply for a special procedure to confirm their level of educational qualifications. In such cases, the education superintendent may confirm, by way of an administrative decision, the primary, lower secondary, basic vocational or upper secondary level of educational qualifications and the entitlement to continue one's education in Poland, including the entitlement to apply for admission to a higher education programme. In order to do so, the person applying for this procedure should submit:

- an original or a duplicate of the certificate, or documents which make it possible to determine, indirectly, the level of educational qualifications or entitlement to continue education, including, in particular, documents which confirm the professional qualifications, job position, internships or work placements obtained, OR
- the declaration of the applicant concerning the educational qualifications obtained, the schools, educational institutions or stages of education completed abroad or the entitlements to continue education.

There is no legal provision stating that the lack of documents excludes from one the validation proceedings (as for the non-HE education). The superintendent is obligated to accept any documentation (even if written and signed by the applicant). All documents must be translated by a certified interpreter from any EU Member State. If there is a problem with the appointment of a certified interpreter because the official language is not very common, it may be another person, if not objectionable (e.g. a literary translator).

The education superintendent may also conduct the verification interview with the applicant to assess the level of his/her education. The interview can take place in a language that is known to the person seeking confirmation of the education level. It is a form of orientation test to determine whether the person has ever had contact with the school system and to allow that person to continue education or take further action in order to start a job. It is conducted by a committee of teachers appointed by the superintendent. Refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection do not bear the costs of the proceedings of this compulsory interview (e.g. the appointment of the

¹⁴ The extent to which they are able to benefit from these rights remains debatable.

commission, participation of teachers and the interpreter). This procedure came into force in March 2015 and its practical application has not been reported since then. It is also not known whether the potential beneficiaries are informed about these possibilities. They also apply to people who hold a permit for temporary stay in Poland or have suffered a loss as a result of an armed conflict, natural disaster or other humanitarian crisis, whether of human or natural origin.

Source: The Ministry of Education, <https://en.men.gov.pl/2015/10/30/recognition-of-foreign-school-certificates-and-diplomas-in-poland/>

10 Validation methods

As indicated in the 2010 and 2014 updates, the most common validation method applied in Poland is a mixed approach. It usually consists of an examination in the form of a test of work activity, based on checking the practical skills, accompanied by a theoretical part (either written or oral examination). Other methods that can be used to validate competences include:

- presenting a portfolio that confirms achievements and documents competences in the field; and,
- providing letters from former employers confirming that during a certain period the employee was involved in a specific activity (documented experience).

Depending on the type of competences, validation can also take the form of a probationary period.

A good illustration of the typical validation process is the examination carried out by the craft chambers. A candidate for a journeyman's exam can use one of the following seven paths, taking into account his or her education, professional qualifications and period of practice of occupation which is going to be examined:

- completed journeyman training;
- completed training in an occupation outside the school system;
- completed training for adults;
- three years of performance of the occupation, which is examined;
- secondary school leaving certificate, or other secondary school providing vocational education associated with the profession, which is examined;
- professional degree in the relevant profession falling within the scope of the occupation, which is examined and after gaining a degree, at least six-months practice in the profession which is going to be examined;
- certificate of completed examination or qualification certificate¹⁵ and at least one year of practice in the profession which is going to be examined.

In addition, each candidate has to have a lower secondary school diploma. In the case of a master's degree, there are six possible paths, taking into account education, professional qualifications and period of practice in the relevant occupation which is going to be examined:

¹⁵ Until 2012 it was possible to obtain a qualification certificate or certificate of completed vocational examination organised by the craft chambers' examination boards. Under this system it was possible to obtain a qualification in any occupation included in the Polish classification of occupations. The main problem with this examination was connected with the virtual absence of any educational standards for these professions and in the 2011 reform, these examinations were abolished.

- certificate of journeyman or equivalent in the profession and a three-year period of practice in the profession which is going to be examined;
- at least six years professional experience in the occupation which is going to be examined;
- certificate of journeyman or equivalent in a profession which is related to the profession which is going to be examined and following the exam, a three-year period of practice;
- master's diploma in a profession which is related to the profession which is going to be examined and following the exam, a one-year period of practice;
- secondary general school leaving certificate or other secondary school certificate providing vocational education associated with the profession which is going to be examined, and two years of professional experience after obtaining a certificate;
- tertiary school degree in the specialisation that falls within the scope of the profession which is going to be examined, and following at least one year of professional experience.

Master diploma candidates must have completed at least upper secondary education. The vocational exam is divided into practical and theoretical parts. During the practical test candidates perform tasks to verify their practical skills. Tasks are set by the examination committee on the basis of the examination standard according to the level of journeyman or master in the particular profession. Assessment of the results of the practical test is conducted by members of the examination committee according to criteria approved by the Polish Craft Association. The theoretical exam is divided into two parts: a written exam answering questions about seven themes for journeyman (professional accounting, business documentation, CAD, the rules and principles of health and safety at work, the basic principles of environmental protection, basic labour laws and basic issues in the field business management) and nine themes for master (cited above plus the basics of psychology and pedagogy and teaching methodology). The oral part of the exam consists of answering questions concerning three themes: technology, theory of machines and materials science. Questions are open and developed on the basis of examination standards (Kossakowska, 2013).

It is also worth mentioning that in the case of vocational examinations carried out by Regional Examination Boards, it is possible to pass the theoretical examination using an electronic system. Such an examination lasts 60 minutes and consists of a test containing 40 closed tasks, each containing four answer choices, of which only one answer is correct (Central Examination Board, 2012).

It should be noted that theoretically it could be difficult for candidates to pass external vocational examinations (*egzamin potwierdzający kwalifikacje zawodowe*) without having attended formal education/training, even for a specialist in a certain profession, if s/he did not graduate from vocational school. This is due to the fact that apart from skills and competences related to one's occupation, it is also necessary to have a particular knowledge, e.g. about labour law, to undertake the exam successfully. Hence, a person who is a specialist in a certain profession, but has not finished relevant courses or school, still cannot confirm his or her specific knowledge and skills with an appropriate document. This situation has been changed by the recent reform of the education system.

According to 2010 and 2014 updates, the most commonly used methods at the identification and documentation stages of the validation process are portfolio and document analysis. However, the piloting of the IQS by the Provincial Labour Office in Cracow has shown that there can be considerable difficulties with collecting the documentation among validation participants. This may in turn prolong the whole process given the time necessary for obtaining the relevant documents or evidence and results in need for verification based on other methods (IBE Team, 2015). As for the assessment, observation, tests and examinations are the most popular methods. This was also confirmed via the piloting of the

IQS by the Provincial Labour Office in Krakow, where the most common form of verification (assessment) of learning outcomes used by institutions conducting the pilot was an exam/test or a practical task. Given that there are no specific standards for evidence of learning outcomes and no confidence in such evidence, these methods of verification may be prevalent in the initial period of operation of the qualifications system. Some changes can occur in this respect when different parties involved in the validation process, including the institutions issuing the documents certifying qualifications, will gain confidence in the process (The Provincial Labour Office in Krakow, 2015). The adequacy of methods applied, assessment criteria for the qualification as well as reliability of their application will be evaluated periodically as part of the internal evaluation procedure conducted by the certification bodies. Validation process and methods to assess learning outcomes will be also analysed by the external quality assurance body (Bacia, 2014).

Validation providers were also drawing on the forms of validation used in formal education. This was probably due to the lack of trust in described professional experience, problems with the documentation of learning outcomes and the fact that this type of verification method is the simplest and cheapest to implement. What turned out to be problematic for such an approach was to elaborate a system of evaluating these tests/exams. In most cases, it meant an attempt to 'transpose' the scoring/percentage system functioning in formal education, but it was difficult to refer the results to the zero-one system of validation learning outcomes. Furthermore, it can be problematic for those adults who are not used to such forms of validation of competences (examinations/tests) any more as they may have trouble proving their learning outcomes and thus be cautious about the implemented system. In turn, the evaluation/verification of validation users in the workplace can somewhat distort the reality, because being in a new place, among strangers and under the pressure, requires more competences than just the skills for a given position.

According to the validation guidelines prepared to support the implementation of the IQS in Poland, the requirements for validation should address, inter alia, at least verification methods. They may be defined at a general level and indicate only the type of method (e.g. practical examination), allowing the use of specific alternative methods (e.g. the observation in the workplace or simulation). In justified cases, the requirements may be more detailed and indicate a specific method to be applied. In the case of assessing the evidence of possessing the learning outcomes provided by the candidate, requirements for documenting learning outcomes can be included in the description of the qualification, e.g. the information on the types of acceptable documents, their presentation, and evaluation criteria. Requirements for methods of verification may be supplemented by information on the tools of verification – both in terms of concrete solutions and tips for designing validation (IBE Team, 2015).

Finally, the methods should be adapted to the way of obtaining them by a person undertaking the validation process. It refers to the basic assumption of validation that testing and validation of learning outcomes is independent of how they have been acquired. Such an approach helps to avoid discrimination of people with competences acquired mainly through informal education, which are difficult to document or verify using traditional methods, such as a written exam (IBE Team, 2015).

11 References

11.1 References

The Act of 22 December 2015 on the Integrated Framework of Qualifications, OJ 2016 item 64, <http://isap.sejm.gov.pl/DetailsServlet?id=WDU20160000064> (accessed on 10 February 2016).

Regulation of the Minister of Education of 14 September 2012 on journeyman exam, master exam and examination carried out by the examination boards of Chambers of Polish Craft Association, OJ 2012 item 1117.

Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 7 February 2012 on the core curriculum for VET, OJ 2012 item 184.

Bacia, E. (2014) Validation of learning outcomes acquired outside the formal education system as a new challenge for lifelong learning policy. Warsaw: Institute for Educational Research.

Banyś, W. (2014) Integrated system, Academic Forum, FA 09/2014, <https://forumakademickie.pl/fa/2014/09/zintegrowany-system/> (accessed on 10 February 2016).

Boni M. (ed.) (2009) Poland 2030 - Development Challenges [*Polska 2030 - wyzwania rozwojowe*], Warsaw: Prime Minister's Office, 2009, https://www.mpips.gov.pl/gfx/mpips/userfiles/public/1_NOWA%20STRONA/Aktualnosci/seniorzy/badania%20aktywne%20starzenie/pl_2030_wyzwania_rozwojowe.pdf (accessed on 10 February 2016).

Cedefop (2011) Vocational Education and Training in Poland, http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/4105_en.pdf (accessed in 2013).

Central Examination Board (2013, 2014, 2015) Information about the results of vocational exams, <http://www.cke.edu.pl/index.php/egzaminy-zawodowe-left/nowy-egzamin-zawodowy/25-egzaminy-zawodowe/396-informacje-em> (accessed on 10 February 2016).

Central Examination Board (2013) Informacja wstępna o wynikach egzaminu potwierdzającego kwalifikacje w zawodzie, który odbył się w roku szkolnym 2012/2013, http://www.cke.edu.pl/images/files/zawodowe/informacje_o_wynikach/2013/informacja_wstepna_o_wynikach_nowego_egzaminu_2013.pdf (accessed in 2013).

Central Statistical Office (2011) Adult education, Warsaw, http://www.stat.gov.pl/cps/rde/xbcr/gus/ED_ksztalcenie_doroslych_2011.pdf (accessed on 29 February 2016).

Centralna Komisja Egzaminacyjna (2012) Procedury organizowania i przeprowadzania egzaminu potwierdzającego kwalifikacje w zawodzie w 2013 roku.

Dybaś, M. (ed.) (2015) Ensuring the quality of awarding qualifications outside the system of education and higher education, Institute for Educational Research, http://biblioteka-krk.ibe.edu.pl/opac_css/doc_num.php?explnum_id=958 (accessed on 29 February 2016)

Education and Training 2020: European benchmarks

The Foundation of Polish Rectors (2014). Level 5 - the missing link? Collective work edited by Chmielecka, E. and Trawińska-Konador, K. Warsaw.URL: http://www.frp.org.pl/publikacje/Poziom_5.pdf (accessed on 10 February 2016).

FRSE (2012) The system of Education in Poland.

Gmaj, I., Grzeszczak, J., Leyk, A., Pierwieniecka, R., Tauber, M. (IBE team) (2015) Guidelines for the validation of learning outcomes, Warsaw: Institute for Educational Research.

IBE (2015a), Parliament has passed the Act on the Integrated Qualifications System, Kwalifikacje po europejski, News, Warsaw: Institute for Educational Research, <http://www.kwalifikacje.edu.pl/en/news> (accessed on 10 February 2016).

IBE (2015b) Integrated Qualifications System - the main elements, PowerPoint presentation from the conference on "Civil society in the integrated qualifications system", 6 November 2015, http://www.kwalifikacje.edu.pl/download/konferencje/wawa61115/ACD_konfZRK_6listopad.pdf (accessed on 29 February 2016).

Kossakowska, J. (2013) Walidacja na przykładzie kwalifikacji czeladnika i mistrza w rzemiośle, http://biblioteka-krk.ibe.edu.pl/opac_css/doc_num.php?explnum_id=331 (accessed in 2013).

The Ministry of National Education (2009) The 2009 Polish National Report on the Implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Programme.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (2007) Raport z II badania wykorzystania krajowych standardów kwalifikacji zawodowych, [http://www.mpips.gov.pl/gfx/mpips/userfiles/File/rynek%20pracy%20proramy/standardy/Raport II badanie wykorzystania standardow24.04.08.pdf](http://www.mpips.gov.pl/gfx/mpips/userfiles/File/rynek%20pracy%20proramy/standardy/Raport%20II%20badanie%20wykorzystania%20standardow24.04.08.pdf) (accessed in 2013).

The Ministry of Science and Higher Education (2014) The Parliament adopted a new law for higher education institutions, News, July 11, 2014, <http://www.nauka.gov.pl/aktualnosci-ministerstwo/sejm-przyjal-nowe-prawo-dla-uczelni.html> (accessed on 29 February 2016).

PAP (2015) MNiSW: potwierdzanie efektów kształcenia - tylko u kandydatów na studia, News, 24 July 2015, <http://naukawpolsce.pap.pl/aktualnosci/news,405897,mnisw-potwierdzanie-efektow-ksztalcenia---tylko-u-kandydatow-na-studia.html> (accessed on 29 February 2016).

Poczmańska, A., Saryusz-Wolski, T., Stęchły, W., Tauber, M. i Ziewiec-Skokowska, G. (2015) Standard for describing qualifications awarded outside the education and higher education systems. A Guide [*Standard opisu kwalifikacji nadawanych poza systemami oświaty i szkolnictwa wyższego. Przewodnik*], Warsaw: Institute for Educational Research, http://www.kwalifikacje.edu.pl/images/download/Publikacje/zad_9_SOK_przewodnik_3010_interaktywny.pdf (accessed on 29 February 2016).

The Polish Craft Association, Examination activity of Chambers of Crafts, <http://www.zrp.pl/Dzia%C5%82ano%C5%9B%C4%87ZRP/O%C5%9Bwiatazawodowa/Dzia%C5%82alno%C5%9B%C4%87egzaminacyjna/tabid/70/language/pl-PL/Default.aspx>

The Polish Craft Association (2010) Information from educational activities in 2009 [*Informacje z działalności oświatowej za rok 2009*], Związek Rzemiosła Polskiego, Warsaw 2010.

Prime Minister's Office (2013) Resolution on the adoption of the strategic document "The lifelong learning perspective" [*Uchwała w sprawie przyjęcia dokumentu strategicznego „Perspektywa uczenia się przez całe życie”*], News, 10 September 2013, <https://www.premier.gov.pl/wydarzenia/decyzje-rzadu/uchwala-w-sprawie-przyjecia-dokumentu-strategicznego-perspektywa-uczenia.html> (accessed on 29 February 2016).

PRISMA - Centre for Development Studies (2007) Euro-Validation. Lifelong Learning Validation for Sustainable Rural Development – A Good Practice Guide.

Refernet (2009) Notatka informacyjna - Kształcenie dorosłych (Adult education – a memorandum), Central Statistical Office (GUS), Warszawa.

Regional Labour Office in Cracow (2015) Malopolska pilot components of the integrated qualifications system - supplement. Projects of Regional Labour Office in Cracow, <https://www.pociagdokariery.pl/publikacje-1/111,malopolski-pilotaz-elementow-zintegrowanego-systemu-kwalifikacji-suplement> (accessed on 29 February 2016).

Sławiński S., Chłóń-Domińczak A. (eds.) (2015) Raport referencyjny - aktualizacja. Odniesienie Polskiej Ramy Kwalifikacji na rzecz uczenia się przez całe życie do Europejskiej Ramy Kwalifikacji (Referencing Report- an update. Referencing the Polish Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning to the European Qualifications Framework.), PQF Team and prof. dr hab. inż. Kraśniewski, A., Warsaw: Institute for Educational Research.

Stęchły, W., Ziewiec-Skokowska, G. (2015) Standard description of qualifications originating outside the systems of education and higher education, PowerPoint presentation from the conference on "Civil society in the integrated qualifications system", 6 November 2015, Warsaw,

http://www.kwalifikacje.edu.pl/download/opisy_kwalifikacji/schemat_opisu_kwalifikacji.pdf (accessed on 29 February 2016).

Sztandar-Sztanderska, U. (2009) Polish Qualifications Framework and the labour market. In 'From the European to the National Qualifications Framework', a publication prepared under the project of the Ministry of National Education, 'Stocktaking of competences and qualifications for the Polish labour market and the development of a national qualifications framework', <http://www.krk.org.pl/pl/publikacje2> (accessed in 2013).

Wyrozębski, P. (2009) Approach to creating curricula based on learning outcomes [*Podejście do tworzenia programów nauczania oparte na efektach kształcenia*], e-mentor, No 3/2009.

11.2 Sources

2016 sources

- Department for Vocational Training and Continuing Education, the Ministry of Education
- Institute for Labour Market Analyses
- Institute for Educational Research.



Country report Poland

2016 update to the European inventory on
validation of non-formal and informal learning

The 2012 Council recommendation on validation encourages Member States to put in place national arrangements for validation by 2018. These arrangements will enable individuals to increase the visibility and value of their knowledge, skills and competences acquired outside formal education and training: at work, at home or in voluntary activities.

This country report is one of 36 that, together with a synthesis report and thematic reports, constitute the European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning. The inventory is a regularly updated overview of validation practices and arrangements in all Member States, EFTA countries and Turkey. It is a reference point for information on validation in Europe. It is organised around the principles defined in the 2012 Council Recommendation that were further elaborated in the European guidelines for validation. This is its sixth update (2004, 2005, 2008, 2010, 2014 and 2016).



CEDEFOP

European Centre for the Development
of Vocational Training

Europe 123, 570 01 Thessaloniki (Pylea), GREECE
PO Box 22427, 551 02 Thessaloniki, GREECE
Tel. +30 2310490111, Fax +30 2310490020, Email: info@cedefop.europa.eu

[visit our portal www.cedefop.europa.eu](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu)
