

# NQF Development in Poland

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# 1 Work on the Polish NQF and its implementation

Poland has many types of qualifications, many ways of awarding them and a large number of institutions which award them on the basis of various laws; however, all parts of the system do not form one logical and orderly whole. This is why Poland had to concurrently take on the broader challenge of introducing systemic solutions in the field of qualifications when it started work on developing a national qualifications framework. The establishment of a coherent national qualifications system has been announced by the Government in its strategic document entitled: *Perspectives for Lifelong Learning*.

As a result of work in many areas, a modern national qualifications system based on learning outcomes will be established in Poland. This system will comprise all the activities undertaken by the State which are associated with the formal recognition of all types of learning outcomes, with the Polish Qualifications Framework (PQF) as its central part. The new system will include a variety of pathways in which qualifications can be obtained, e.g. by broader introduction of clear procedures for the transfer and accumulation of credits (ECTS, ECVET), a move which will make qualifications more accessible. Quality assurance standards, adopted in line with the EQF principles, will form an important element of the system. The direction taken to transform the Polish system of qualifications follows the principles underpinning the common policy agreed by the Member States of the European Union.

Poland started work on the development and implementation of its qualification framework in October 2008<sup>1</sup>. In the first stage (October 2008 – January 2010), experts were working on the PQF as part of a systemic project entitled: “Establishing a balance sheet of competences and qualifications for the Polish labour market and development of the National Qualification Framework model” (Fig. 1). As a result, an experts’ model of the PQF was developed, including initial implementation guidelines. The findings of the team of experts have been published in the document entitled: *From the European to the National Qualification Framework*<sup>2</sup>.

In order to coordinate activities accompanying the development of the Polish Qualification Framework, on 17 February 2010 the President of the Council of Ministers set up an Interdepartmental Team for Lifelong Learning, including the National Qualifications Framework. To ensure that tasks related to the monitoring of the development and implementation of the Polish Qualifications Framework are fulfilled, a subteam was created within this Interdepartmental Team, i.e. the Steering Committee for the National Qualifications Framework and Lifelong Learning (NQF Committee), chaired by the Minister of Science and Higher Education. The NQF Committee is made up of representatives delegated by: Minister of Science and Higher Education; Minister of National Education; Minister of Economy; Minister of Labour and Social Policy; Minister of Regional Development; Minister of Foreign Affairs; Minister of Culture and National Heritage; Minister of Health; Minister of National Defence; Minister of Internal Affairs, and Minister of Infrastructure.

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<sup>1</sup> The work on the model of the qualifications framework for tertiary education was initiated in 2006. In April 2011, the President of the Republic of Poland signed the amended Law on Higher Education, which introduced a qualifications framework for tertiary education in Poland. The Law entered into force on 1 October 2011.

<sup>2</sup> The Polish version of the document can be accessed at: [www.kwalifikacje.org.pl/dokumenty](http://www.kwalifikacje.org.pl/dokumenty).

Figure 1. Development and implementation stages of the Polish Qualification Framework



Source: prepared by IBE

In the period from July 2010 to the end of 2013, the Educational Research Institute (IBE) will continue work on the Polish Qualifications Framework (Box 1), as part of the project entitled: “The development of terms of reference for the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework and the National Qualifications Register for lifelong learning”. This is the second stage of work on the development and implementation of the PQF (Fig. 1).

At IBE, this work will be carried out by the NQF Team, bringing together both experts and analysts and headed by Dr. Agnieszka Chłoń-Domińczak. The aim of the project is to design the Polish Qualifications Framework in its final version; develop a model of the institution responsible for the national qualifications system along with an overall concept of how the national qualifications register is intended to function; propose the principles for transferring and accumulating credits (including ECVET), and produce a draft of the Polish referencing report to be submitted to the European Commission.

#### Box 1. The Educational Research Institute (IBE)

The Educational Research Institute (IBE) is a research institution carrying out interdisciplinary research on the operation and efficacy of the educational system in Poland. The Institute takes part in research projects at home and abroad; it also prepares expert studies and offers advisory services in this regard. The Institute actively promotes evidence-based policy in education and attaches particular importance to research whose findings can be applied in educational policy and practice, both nationally and locally. As of 1 October 2010, in accordance with the Act on Research Institutes of 30 April 2010 (*Dz.U.* [Journal of Laws] No. 96, item 618), the Institute was formally transformed into a research institute. IBE, which employs some 240 staff, operates under the supervision of the Minister of National Education.

Currently the Institute, among its other tasks, is implementing two systemic projects commissioned by the Ministry of National Education and co-financed with EU funds from the ESF Human Capital Operational Programme (HC OP), its Priority III - High quality of the education system. One is entitled: “Teaching quality and school effectiveness - building tools for research”, and the second project, directly related to the development of the national qualifications system, is entitled: “The development of terms of reference for the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework and the National Qualifications Register for lifelong

learning". The latter project, which is a continuation of the work on the Polish Qualifications Framework, is regarded as the second stage of the development and implementation of the PQF.

A series of surveys has also been planned (Tab. 1), with the aim of providing the knowledge needed to design a consistent system of qualifications in Poland which addresses the needs of learners, employers and providers and makes it possible to transform the present set of arrangements into a coherent qualifications system.

Table 1. Surveys planned as part of the project "The development of terms ..."

1. Managing competences in enterprises
2. Survey of training providers and NGOs
3. SWOT analysis of the general, VET and tertiary education systems in Poland
4. Validation of learning outcomes in tertiary education
5. Survey of applied procedures and completed projects related to the validation of competences
6. Quality assurance for qualifications: state of play
7. Survey (taking stock) of qualifications and competences in selected sectors (5-6 sectors) – follow-up
8. Survey of NQS stakeholders
9. Survey of mobility of students, learners and graduates
10. Accumulation and transfer of credits in VET in Poland – application of ECVET and ECTS and development of SATO (in Polish: <i>System Akumulacji i Transferu Osiągnięć</i> , or the Credit Accumulation and Transfer System )
11. Survey of guidance and counselling in the education system and of career bureaus at universities

Source: prepared by IBE

The implementation of the Polish Qualifications Framework is supported by projects from various fields of education, in particular vocational and tertiary education and also the labour market, some of which are being implemented as part of Priority III HC OP. These include for example: "Modernisation of exams confirming vocational qualifications"; "Vocational schools – schools of positive choice"; "Development of core curricula as the key to modernising vocational education"; "The NQF in tertiary education as a tool for enhancing the quality of education"; "Supporting studies in mutual recognition of accreditation decisions in the European Higher Education Area"; "Developing sets of national vocational competence standards required by employers".

The plans for the third stage of the anticipated schedule (Fig. 1) include implementing the Polish Qualifications Framework and the national qualifications register. This stage of work is expected to begin in 2012, which means that IBE's project activities in this period will support the implementation of the PQF by the designated institution operating within the government administration. It also implies a two-year period when two projects will be implemented in parallel, a situation which should allow for a smooth transfer of the produced knowledge and methodologies to the institution responsible for the operation and development of the system of qualifications in Poland (including the PQF and the national qualification register). It will also make it possible to carry out tests and pilot projects and make the necessary improvements in the mechanisms and procedures developed in the second stage of work.

The assumptions underpinning the system of qualifications based on the Polish Qualifications Framework were developed by the NQF Team at the Educational Research Institute. In August 2011, these assumptions were approved by the Interdepartmental Team for Lifelong Learning, including the National Qualifications Framework<sup>3</sup>. Prior to this, the proposed assumptions for the future qualifications system and the PQF had been consulted with a broad group of stakeholders, in a public debate which lasted over four months (Box 2) and at regular meetings with stakeholders and experts, which were held at the Institute. In addition to approving the assumptions to the qualifications system, the Interdepartmental Team for Lifelong Learning, including the National Qualification Framework, also accepted *A Glossary of Key Concepts Related to the National Qualifications System*<sup>4</sup>.

September 2011 saw the beginning of the consultations on the PQF assumptions and the qualifications system in Poland with experts from abroad, as part of work on the preparation of the referencing report. It is expected that the referencing report will be submitted to the EQF AG in the second half of 2012.

### **Box 2. Public debate on the Polish Qualifications Framework**

In February 2011, the NQF Team invited the stakeholders of the future qualifications system to participate in a public debate. The aim of the debate was to ensure that the PQF, which is to form an integral part of the qualifications system, is not only a product of experts' work but is confronted with the practitioners' expectations right from the outset. The formula of the debate makes it possible to involve social partners in designing the new system, for example influencing the content of the Polish Qualifications Framework.

The overriding aim of the debate was to involve users of the qualifications system in the process of its construction in Poland. The discussion was expected to encourage: (1) a review of the existing elements of the qualifications system; (2) a review of the proposed, new elements of the qualifications system; (3) adding elements which were missing from the qualifications system.

During the meetings, groups worked to develop a common stance, and discussed not only the need to establish a new system of qualifications but also the attendant challenges and threats, as well as possible ways to overcome them. Work on the proposed Polish Qualifications Framework was conducted in three thematic groups:

- The first group discussed the requirements concerning skills, as well as personal and social competences in the Polish Qualifications Framework;
- The second group discussed the process of attaining qualifications based on learning outcomes acquired in lifelong learning;
- The third group discussed the system of validating learning outcomes and quality assurance mechanisms, i.e. the validity of qualifications obtained in Poland both at home and abroad.

Each of these groups met five times, with meetings held from February to June 2011. During the meetings, participants exchanged views, proposed ideas and raised objections to individual elements of the Framework and to issues relevant to the Polish labour market and education system. The practical experiences of the participants related to the issues being raised were also shared.

A plenary conference, concluding the debate in all the areas, was held on 15 June 2011 in Warsaw. This however, is not the end of the public debate on the new way of describing qualifications. Further meetings and conferences are planned in order to familiarise stakeholders with several other projects accompanying the development of the qualifications system and to consult the solutions proposed.

The participants of the debate included representatives of: ministries and public institutions, national institutions from the education sector, employer organisations and trade unions, labour offices, training providers, associations, NGOs, research and advisory institutions. Altogether, the debate attracted some 200 participants representing 101 institutions. The description of the debate and how it progressed can be found on the project website at: [www.kwalifikacje.org.pl](http://www.kwalifikacje.org.pl).

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<sup>3</sup> A set of documents which together form the assumptions of the qualifications system, approved by the Interdepartmental Team for Lifelong Learning, including the National Qualification Framework, will be made available (also in English) on the project website : [www.kwalifikacje.org.pl](http://www.kwalifikacje.org.pl).

<sup>4</sup> The glossary can be accessed at the project website.

## 2 The Polish Qualifications Framework

The Polish Qualifications Framework based on learning outcomes will be at the heart of the qualifications system. The PQF will show interactions between qualifications and will integrate the different national qualifications subsystems. It will also describe the hierarchy of the qualification levels. The PQF distinguishes eight levels of qualifications, each linked to a corresponding level in the European Qualification Framework.

In the Framework, each of the levels is defined by descriptors which define, in general terms, the learning outcomes required at a given level. The descriptors in the PQF are intended to encompass the entire spectrum of learning outcomes, from the lowest to the highest level. They intend to make visible learning that takes place in work, life and study situations; they also take into account initial learning (at school/university) as well as learning that takes place later on (upon completion of education at school/university, during occupational activity, for example). The PQF also takes into account outcomes that are attained in formal and non-formal education and through informal learning.

Similarly to the EQF, learning outcomes in the PQF have been divided into three groups:

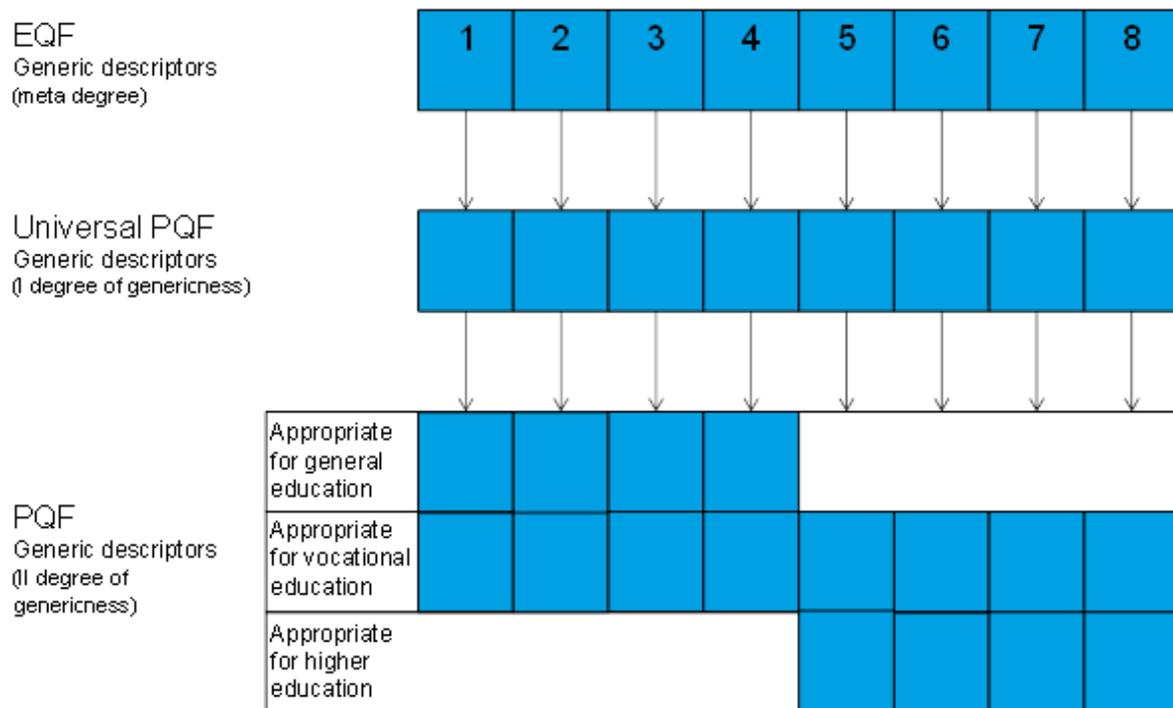
- Knowledge – a set of substantiated judgments (a body of facts, theories and principles of conduct) resulting from the cognitive activity of a human being. In the context of the qualification framework, knowledge is described as theoretical or factual, using the categories of “scope” and “depth of understanding”;
- Skills – In the context of the qualification framework, skills are described as cognitive and practical; they are defined in terms of such skills as “solving problems and applying knowledge in practice”, “learning” and “communicating”;
- Social competence – proven (in work and study situations or personal development) ability to use one’s knowledge and skills within the context of an internalised system of values. For the purposes of the qualification framework, these competences are described using the following categories: “identity”, “cooperation” and “responsibility”.

The descriptors of each subsequent level in the PQF differ from those at the preceding (lower) level. The differences are significant, and relate to the amount and depth of knowledge, degree of complexity/difficulty of required skills as well as to the level of autonomy and ability to assume responsibility for one’s own work, activity or study (individually or in a team) and, at the higher levels, also responsibility for the work, activity or study of others.

According to the European concept of the qualifications framework, the level descriptors in the Polish Qualifications Framework are generic, which means that they are formulated in general terms and are therefore relevant to different fields. The point of reference for the Polish Qualification Framework is the descriptors defined in the European Qualifications Framework. This will allow the Polish qualification levels to be clearly related to the eight levels of the EQF.

The descriptors in the Polish Qualifications Framework differ in the extent of detail provided in the description and the field that they relate to. The PQF distinguishes three degrees of genericness of the descriptors (Fig. 2).

**Figure 2. Degrees of genericness of the descriptors in the Polish Qualification Framework**



Source: prepared by IBE.

The first degree of genericness includes descriptors which are universal in scope. They show learning outcomes at all the levels, in general, tertiary and vocational education.

The second degree of genericness includes descriptors which address differences in the specific areas of general, tertiary and vocational education. These are:

- Descriptors of learning outcomes relevant to general education. These descriptors may be used in another sector, but are not universal in scope. They describe learning outcomes at levels 1-4,
- Descriptors of learning outcomes relevant to vocational education. These descriptors may be used in another sector, but are not universal in scope. They describe learning outcomes at levels 1-8,
- Descriptors of learning outcomes relevant to tertiary education. These descriptors may be used in another sector, but are not universal in scope. They describe learning outcomes at levels 5 – 8.

Figure 2 does not show descriptors of the third degree of genericness, which are important for the entire system. An example of this category includes descriptors which have been developed for eight areas of tertiary education. Preliminary analyses indicate that some provisions in the core curricula will serve as third degree of genericness descriptors for general education. The descriptors in sectoral qualifications frameworks will also be third degree of genericness descriptors.

More information on the Polish Qualifications Framework and other key components of the Polish system of qualifications, viz.: the national register of qualifications; validation, accumulation and transfer of credits; quality assurance for qualifications, can be found in the regularly updated project website.