Validation of learning outcomes achieved in non-formal and informal education is related to mechanisms applied in formal education. In Poland, intensive work has been underway for several years to introduce changes in these areas. They involve not only the development of a system for validation, certification and transfer of learning outcomes and, consequently, of qualifications, but also the revision and standardisation of terminology.

**Integrated Qualifications System**

The Act on the Integrated Qualifications System (IQS) came into force on 15 January 2016. The main instruments of the IQS include:

- the 8-level Polish Qualifications Framework providing information on knowledge, skills and social competences; and
- the Integrated Qualifications Register.

The Act defines concepts such as qualifications, full and partial qualifications, market qualifications and regulated qualifications. This will increase the transparency and comparability of skills acquired outside school.

The IQS aims to:

- ensure quality of the qualifications awarded;
- ensure recognition of learning outcomes achieved in non-formal and informal education;
- enable the accumulation and recognition of achievements/credits;
- provide information on qualifications available in Poland;
- enable comparing qualifications acquired in Poland and other EU countries.

The responsibility for coordination of the IQS rests with the Minister of National Education.

With the vocational education and training system now being more open to learning in non-school settings (which concerns, in particular, adult education and training), effective mechanisms are being developed for the validation of learning outcomes achieved by adults, also through non-formal and informal learning.

**Polish Qualifications Framework and the Integrated Qualifications Register**

The Polish Qualifications Framework (PQF) describes eight levels of qualifications distinguished in Poland and referenced to the corresponding levels of the European Qualifications Framework, as defined in Annex II to the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April
Qualifications in the PQF are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and social competences. The PQF assigns levels to full qualifications. Such qualifications are confirmed by a certificate or diploma. The levels of the PQF and corresponding certificates and diplomas are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Qualifications and corresponding levels in the Polish Qualifications Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualification levels</th>
<th>Certificates and diplomas confirming a given level of qualifications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level I</td>
<td>Primary school leaving certificate: awarded to pupils finishing the 6-year primary school existing until the current reform of the school system. 1st grade music school leaving certificate 1st grade general music school leaving certificate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level II</td>
<td>Primary school leaving certificate: awarded to pupils who will finish the 8-year primary school established by the current reform of the school system. Lower secondary school leaving certificate: awarded to pupils finishing the lower secondary school which is being phased out as part of the current reform of the school system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level III</td>
<td>Diploma confirming vocational qualifications awarded upon finishing a stage I sectoral vocational school, or achieving the same level of education through other equivalent education paths, and upon passing exams confirming qualifications for a given occupation. Diploma confirming vocational qualifications awarded upon finishing a basic vocational school, or achieving the same level of education through other equivalent education paths, and upon passing exams confirming qualifications for a given occupation. Journeyman certificate awarded upon finishing a basic vocational school or stage I sectoral vocational school and passing examinations for so-called craftsman occupations. The qualifications acquired should correspond to the level of qualifications identified in the PQF.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level IV</td>
<td>Diploma confirming vocational qualifications upon finishing a technical upper secondary school or post-secondary school, or achieving the same level of education through other equivalent education paths, and upon passing exams confirming qualifications for a given occupation. Art school diploma confirming a vocational title. The qualifications acquired should correspond to the level of qualifications identified in the PQF. Maturity certificate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level V</td>
<td>Diploma of a teacher training college Diploma of foreign language teacher training college Diploma of a college of social work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level VI</td>
<td>First-cycle graduate diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level VII</td>
<td>Second-cycle graduate diploma Long-cycle graduate diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level VIII</td>
<td>Doctoral / PhD diploma</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Based on the Act of 22 December 2015 on the Integrated Qualifications System, with further
integrated part of the formal education system (see Table 5). At present, the IQR includes 9,620 full qualifications (acquired within the school education and higher education system) which are assigned to 4 areas.

**Validation**

The fundamental rule in the validation process is assessing whether a person knows, can and is able to do what is specified in the description of a qualification. The IQR places emphasis on compliance with validation standards, and this includes the separation or independence of the validation process from the learning process.

In Cedefop’s ‘European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning’ (2009) (updated in 2015), several perspectives are presented: individual, organisational, national, and European.

The validation process includes:

- identification of learning outcomes;
- documentation of learning outcomes;
- assessment; and
- certification of learning outcomes achieved in the form of a qualification, credit points (ECTS, ECVET) leading to a qualification or in another accepted form.

It is planned that these arrangements should be connected to the Integrated Qualifications System and compliant with the European Qualifications Framework by 2018.

Poland does not yet have a single coherent system for the validation of learning outcomes achieved in non-formal and informal education. Existing procedures are applied in various sectors and related to various practices and validation processes. Some of them have been in place for many years now, others are innovations adopted from abroad, and still other have been introduced on a pilot basis.

In 2011-2012, the Educational Research Institute (Instytut Badań Edukacyjnych) carried out a ‘Study on procedures applied for the validation of learning outcomes achieved in non-formal and informal education’ (commissioned to Coffey International Development). The study covered 5 areas: construction industry, ICT services, service industry, automotive industry and financial services. The procedures applied in this area were presented from the perspective of participants and their employers.

**Extramural examinations**

Extramural (external) exams are one of the methods of validating learning outcomes achieved outside the formal education system. They enable validation of learning outcomes achieved by adults choosing to prepare independently for exams at the level of primary school, lower secondary school, basic vocational school or general upper secondary school which cover the requirements laid down in
the core curriculum for general education. In the case of basic vocational schools, adults may also prepare independently for an exam confirming qualifications for a given occupation (extramural / external vocational exam). It is worth noting that an external vocational exam is not conducted for all occupations for which students are trained in the school education system; for example, it does not cover medical occupations.

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