

The validation of non-formal and informal learning in Poland. Implementation of the 2012 Council Recommendation

ONE-OFF REPORT



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Editor:

Iwona Gmaj

Authors:

Iwona Gmaj

Joanna Grzeszczak

Karolina Kwiatosz

Roksana Pierwieniecka

Sylwia Walicka

Consultants:

Dr. Tomasz Saryusz-Wolski

English language editing:

Barbara Przybylska

Graphic design and layout:

Anna Nowak

Graphics on the cover: Shutterstock

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Instytut Badań Edukacyjnych / Educational Research Institute

ul. Górczewska 8

01-180 Warsaw, Poland

tel. +(48 22) 241 71 00; www.ibe.edu.pl

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1. Introduction

The validation of non-formal and informal learning is a relatively new concept in Poland, but several important steps have already been taken to introduce it at the national scale and across many types of qualifications.

In 2008, Poland began implementing the Recommendation on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (European Parliament and Council of the European Union, 2008). The first notable shift took place in formal education in the 2010s with the introduction of core curricula based on learning outcomes and the validation of non-formal and informal learning, among others, in the form of extramural examinations.

These changes established a new approach to developing qualifications that takes into account learning outcomes, their transfer, validation and quality assurance in accordance with European standards. This provided a foundation for the implementation of the Polish Qualifications Framework and other instruments promoting lifelong learning that would soon encompass the labour market as well.

At that time, the Polish Referencing Report (Sławiński and Dębowski, 2013) was already being developed. When it was presented to the European Commission in 2013, another important stage was completed, as it defined the most important arrangements for the national qualifications system that would allow validation to be performed directly in line with the Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (Council of the European Union, 2012).

The end result of these efforts was the adoption of the Act on the Integrated Qualifications System (IQS) in December 2015 by the Polish parliament (IQS Act). The IQS introduced a new type of qualification to be developed by the labour market that could be awarded as the result of a process designed specifically for adult learners, which allows their learning outcomes to be recognised irrespective of how they were acquired.

Currently, the IQS is being implemented with the support of the Educational Research Institute (Instytut Badań Edukacyjnych – IBE) working on behalf of the Ministry of National Education. In cooperation with the system's stakeholders, the Institute has undertaken multi-directional activities aimed at promoting, among others, the validation of non-formal education and informal learning as one of the most novel elements of the IQS. This complements other strategic initiatives launched by the Polish administration, evidence of a long-term commitment to strengthening human capital.

This report describes all the validation arrangements available in Poland, including those in the formal education system, as well as public activities promoting employment and supporting the labour market. However, it mainly focuses on the new opportunities provided by the IQS, as they directly relate to the instruments and mechanisms promoted as part of the European Union's educational and labour market policies.

2. Features of the validation arrangements

2.1. General information on the Integrated Qualifications System

The IQS Act introduced and defined the following elements (see Figure 1):

- Polish Qualifications Framework (PQF);
- Integrated Qualifications Register (IQR);
- coordination of the IQS;
- stakeholders' role in the IQS;
- typology of qualifications and terminology;
- principles of describing and registering qualifications in the IQR, including validation requirements;
- principles of awarding qualifications included in the IQS, including the arrangements for validation;
- principles of quality assurance.

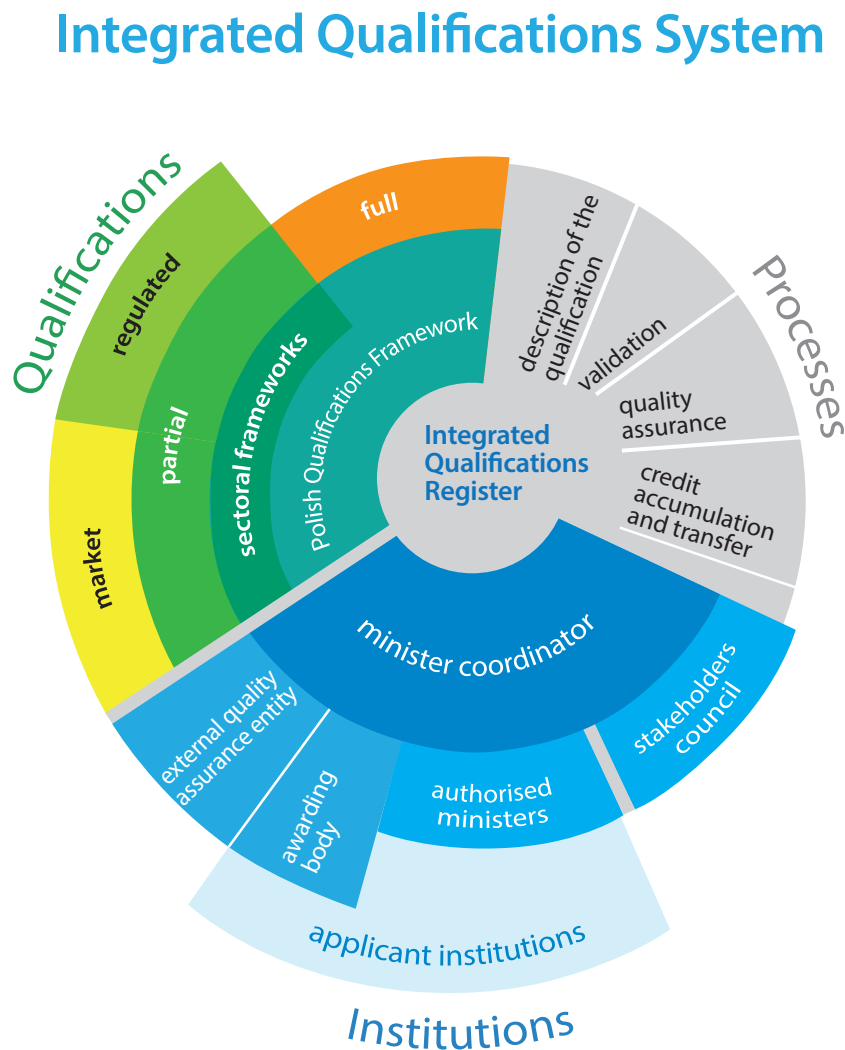
According to the Act, these elements are meant to ensure the quality of awarded qualifications and the ability to recognise learning outcomes acquired through non-formal education and informal learning as well as to successively accumulate credits and have them recognised. Furthermore, the IQS ensures access to information about the qualifications that can be attained in Poland (via the IQR) and finally – the ability to compare the qualifications attained in Poland with qualifications awarded in other Member States of the European Union (via the establishment of the PQF).

Regarding validation itself, the IQS Act introduces a broad understanding of the process as the “validation of learning outcomes” in general, as opposed to the “validation of non-formal and informal learning”. Furthermore, the Act stresses the goal of attaining a qualification and the role of the third stage of validation (assessment), by omitting the identification and documentation of learning outcomes and defining this process as:

...assessing whether a person seeking to have a qualification awarded has attained a distinct part or all of the learning outcomes required for that qualification, regardless of the person's learning path (IQS Act, 2016).

This can be interpreted as a more comprehensive understanding of validation than the definitions given in the 2012 Council Recommendation and the Recommendation on the European Qualifications Framework (2017). Despite these differences, the arrangements for validation in different areas covered by the IQS fulfil the requirements of the Council of the European Union.

Figure 1. Elements of the Integrated Qualifications System



Source: Educational Research Institute.

The system seeks to encompass all qualifications attainable in Poland, while at the same time, maintain their legal identity. Therefore, one of the most important definitions introduced by the IQS Act that in practice translate into different validation arrangements relates to the typology of qualifications included in the system. This typology consists of full qualifications, partial qualifications, statutory qualifications and market qualifications. The structure of this report is organised around this distinction, or more specifically – around a more simplified division between qualifications awarded in formal education (full and partial), statutory qualifications (only partial) and market qualifications (only partial).

Full qualifications are solely those awarded upon completion of programmes in formal education (general, vocational and higher education), after the learner has achieved the learning outcomes required at specific educational stages. This includes, for example, the certificate of completing primary school, the vocational diploma or the master's degree. They are included in the IQR by law. However, the validation, quality assurance principles of awarding qualifications and the principles of supervising the awarding of qualifications from formal education are not governed by the provisions of the IQS Act.

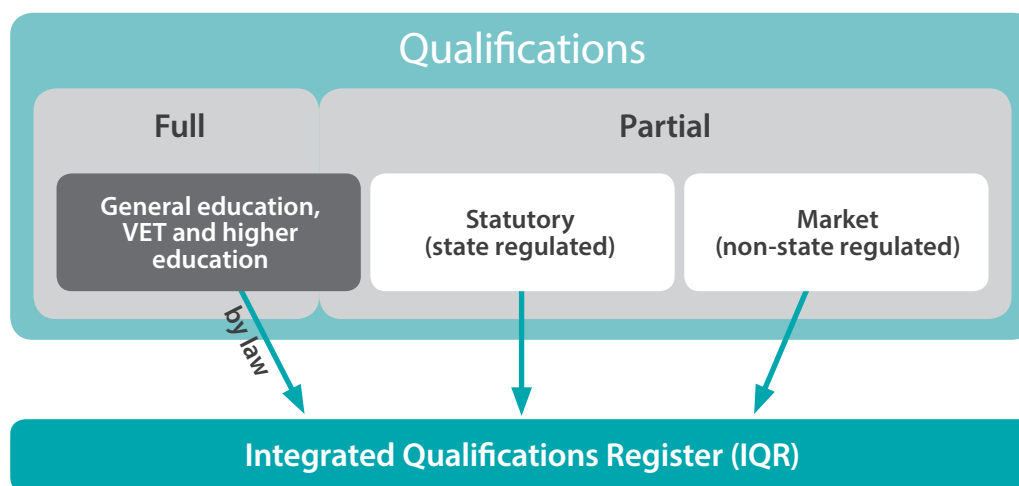
Partial qualifications are those that are included in the IQS and are not full qualifications. All statutory and market qualifications are partial qualifications. Certificates for full and partial qualifications use different types of graphic emblems to indicate the qualification's level.

Statutory qualifications are established by legal provisions other than the acts on the Education System and Higher Education and therefore are awarded outside the formal education system. Statutory qualifications may, but do not have to be included in the IQS. The relevant minister (see p. 8) for the qualification decides whether it is to be included or not. As in the case of qualifications awarded within the formal education system, statutory qualifications must be awarded in accordance with the principles set forth in relevant state regulations. Examples of statutory qualifications include: driver's licence, croupier, judge, nurse, customs agent, EURES adviser, nuclear regulatory inspector, physician or examiner¹.

Market qualifications are not regulated by any legal provisions and are developed by various communities – social organisations, associations, corporations or other groups – on the basis of their experiences. A market qualification can be included in the IQS if an entity implementing organised activities in an area of the economy, labour market, education or training submits an application to the relevant minister to request its inclusion in the IQS and this application is approved. Examples of market qualifications are: real estate management or carpentry assembly in construction².

All qualifications included in the IQS can be found in the Integrated Qualifications Register³.

Figure 2. Types of qualifications included in the Integrated Qualifications Register.



Source: Educational Research Institute.

1 As of December 2018, a total of 25 qualifications relating to different kinds of examiners assessing qualifications available in the formal education system have been included in the IQS.

2 For more about the typology of qualifications and the IQS, see Sławiński, Dębowski, Walicka, Poczmańska (2017).

3 The public register is accessible via the IQR Portal at the following Internet address: <http://rejestr.kwalifikacje.gov.pl/>.

The systemic arrangements for the validation of learning outcomes, characterised broadly above and in greater detail later in this report, were developed in consultation with stakeholders. Because validation is an integral part of the IQS, it is impossible to describe the involvement and coordination of stakeholders without mentioning their participation in the IQS as a whole.

The IQS was developed under the direction of the Minister of National Education in cooperation with social partners, including employers, trade unions, chambers of industry, commerce and skilled crafts, NGOs, educational and research institutions, education and training providers, employment services, and youth organisations. Their opinions had a significant impact on the shape of many solutions implemented in the IQS.

Since the adoption of the IQS Act, a new stage of development of the national qualifications system has begun. Although the Act introduced a new order without establishing new institutions, new roles and tasks have been defined for various entities operating in the IQS. These roles are described below.

Inter-ministerial Taskforce for Lifelong Learning and the Integrated Qualifications System

The Inter-ministerial Taskforce is an auxiliary body of the Prime Minister, chaired by the Minister of National Education. Its current responsibilities include monitoring the implementation of the IQS and other solutions for lifelong learning in Poland, monitoring actions relevant to lifelong learning undertaken within the EU and cooperating with partners and institutions, including the IQS Stakeholders Council. The Inter-ministerial Taskforce consists of all the ministers in the government.

Minister coordinator of the Integrated Qualifications System

According to the IQS Act, the system is coordinated by the “minister coordinator”. This function is entrusted to the Minister of National Education, whose responsibilities include:

- chairing the Inter-ministerial Taskforce for Lifelong Learning and the Integrated Qualifications System,
- coordinating the work of other ministries in relation to the IQS and leading the process of improving and developing the IQS,
- monitoring the IQS, among others, preparing reports on qualifications at the request of the Council of Ministers,
- managing the IQS portal that links to the Integrated Qualifications Register (IQR),
- cooperating with the IQS Stakeholders Council and providing organisational support.

Relevant ministers

A relevant minister is the minister responsible by law for qualifications linked to particular departments of government administration. For example, the relevant minister for qualifications relating to tax counselling is the Minister of Finance.

The tasks of relevant ministers are defined by the IQS Act and include approving the inclusion of qualifications in the IQS, authorising awarding bodies to award qualifications, supervising the process of awarding qualifications and the quality assurance of this process.

Relevant ministers consult with stakeholders as part of the process of including qualifications in the IQS. They also prepare a summary of the consultations, noting the received remarks and suggestions. The summary is published in the IQS portal.

Integrated Qualifications System Stakeholders Council

The IQS Stakeholders Council⁴ is a consultative and advisory body representing stakeholders from different sectors within the IQS. The Council plays a consultative and supportive role to the minister coordinator of the IQS. According to the IQS Act, the Council:

- supports the minister coordinator of the IQS to ensure the consistency of the qualifications system,
- monitors the functioning of the IQS, as well as analyses and exchanges experiences among groups of stakeholders,
- provides opinions on proposals of new legal acts on issues relating to the IQS,
- provides opinions on the recommendations prepared by teams of experts regarding the assignment of a qualification's level,
- provides opinions on sectoral qualifications frameworks before their inclusion in the IQS.

Sector Skills Councils

Sector Skills Councils do not play any formal role within the IQS, but their activities relate to the system, especially to the PQF⁵. The first councils were formed in 2016 as a result of a call for proposals. Each council must include sectoral stakeholders: entrepreneurs, professional organisations, supervisory or regulatory bodies, education and training providers, the relevant ministry.

4 The IQS Stakeholders Council was appointed on 13 July 2016. It consists of representatives from: the National Chamber of Commerce, employers' organisations and trade unions, the Conference of Rectors of Academic Schools in Poland, the Conference of Rectors of Vocational Schools in Poland, the Central Examination Board, entities operating in the field of non-formal education, local governments and the minister coordinator of the Integrated Qualifications System. The IQS Act provides detailed rules for appointing members of the Council, the duration of their term of office, selecting the chairperson of the Council and its operations.

5 At the moment of writing this report, seven Sector Skills Councils have been established: 1) Skills Council for Health and Social Care, 2) Skills Council for the Financial Sector, 3) Skills Council for the IT Sector, 4) Skills Council for the Construction Industry, 5) Skills Council for the Tourism Sector, 6) Skills Council for the Fashion Industry and Innovative Textiles, 7) Sectoral Council for Motorisation and Electromobility.

The main tasks of a Sector Skills Council include:

- conducting research and analytical work on the sector's competence needs as the basis for undertaking new initiatives,
- initiating and supporting the development of new sectoral standards, together with qualifications, in response to new development trends, including regulatory, technological and demographic changes,
- recommending legislative solutions and changes in the area of education and its adaptation to the needs of the labour market in a given sector,
- initiating, managing, and updating their Sectoral Qualifications Framework.

2.2. Qualifications awarded in formal education

As of 2008, it has been possible to obtain most qualifications awarded in general and vocational education by taking extramural examinations. This is intended as a solution for adults who want to raise their level of qualifications without going back to school. The examinations are based on the general education and vocational education core curricula (documents created at the national level, written in the language of learning outcomes). These exams are organised by Regional Examination Boards (*Okręgowe Komisje Egzaminacyjne*), which are supervised by the Central Examination Board (*Centralna Komisja Egzaminacyjna*). In this type of validation, only the assessment stage is performed, neither the identification nor documentation of learning outcomes takes place. It is important to note that certain conditions must be fulfilled in order to take these examinations.

In higher education, the goal was not so much to create the possibility of attaining degrees through the validation of non-formal and informal learning, but to facilitate access to study programmes by recognising learning outcomes acquired outside of higher education. Since 2014, all higher education institutions are required to recognise prior learning, which leads to shortening the period of study.

2.2.1. General education

Any adult can obtain a school leaving certificate for any type of general school (primary, lower secondary, general upper secondary) on the basis of passing extramural examinations in all general courses included in the appropriate core curricula for adult education in the relevant type of school.

Except for meeting the age requirement and submitting a formal application to a Regional Examination Board, there are no additional conditions that must be fulfilled to take primary school level examinations. At subsequent school levels (lower secondary and secondary school levels), one must additionally present a school leaving certificate from the previous school level or a document confirming promotion to the ultimate or penultimate year of school, including from schools for adults.

The examinations are in written form and include closed-ended questions (multiple choice, true-false, matching-type questions, etc.) and open-ended questions (questions requiring more or less elaborated and complex answers). Each exam lasts from 90 to 150 minutes depending on the subject and type of school. They are organised two times per year, in the autumn (October) and winter (February).

It is worth noting that in September 2017, a reform of the formal education system began to be implemented that introduced an eight-year primary school in place of the six-year primary school. A four-year general upper secondary school has been introduced instead of the three-year lower secondary school and the three-year general upper secondary school.

This means that extramural examinations at the primary school level will be based on the old core curricula until 2019 and at the upper secondary school level – until 2023. Examinations relating to the requirements specified in the general education core curriculum for basic vocational schools will be conducted until 2020. After that new core curricula for the new types of schools will apply. Lower secondary school level examinations, including extramural examinations, will end altogether in 2019.

2.2.2. Vocational Education and Training

Similarly to general education, any person can obtain a diploma confirming vocational qualifications at the basic or vocational upper secondary school level. This can be achieved by attaining all the certificates confirming qualifications in an occupation that comprise a given diploma. If an adult has completed lower secondary school or an eight-year primary school and attended out-of-school forms of education, e.g. a vocational qualifying course (for more details see: Sławiński and Dębowski 2013, p. 124), the appropriate vocational examinations can be taken with regular students. If an adult worked in an occupation or attended a vocational school (or other form of education) to prepare for the relevant qualification for at least two years, the examination may be taken extramurally.

The content of the vocational examination is the same for adults and youths and the same certificates are awarded. Such examinations are organised for all but 19 occupations taught in all types of vocational schools. They are conducted at the school attended by the learner, the institution providing the vocational qualifying course, or the workplace where the learner's practicum took place. It is also worth noting that examinations in 53 occupations taught in vocational education are also organised by the craft chambers as part of the Polish craft system⁶. The examination consists of a written part and practical part.

The ability to confirm vocational competences attained outside formal education and the modularisation of vocational education are the result of the already mentioned education system reform begun in 2012. This reform

⁶ The crafts system offers 113 professional qualifications based on the confirmation of learning outcomes acquired as a result of various types of learning, e.g. learning with a craftsperson or as part of an independent professional practice. Craft chambers organise the assessment process for 60 occupations not taught in schools (listed in the classification of professions and specialties needed by the labour market), and 53 school-taught occupations. The assessment is conducted on the basis of standards prepared by the Polish Craft Association, described in terms of learning outcomes and categorised by knowledge, skills and social competences, at the levels of journeyman and master.

distinguished 252 qualifications in the 200 professions that can be attained in vocational schools (basic vocational schools, technical schools, post-secondary schools). They have been described in the language of learning outcomes.

A successive reform of the education system determined that training for 245 qualifications in 215 professions included in the revised classification are to be provided in 5-year vocational secondary schools, post-secondary schools and in new types of vocational schools – stage I sectoral VET schools and stage II sectoral VET schools. The legal changes, effective as of 1 September 2019, enable employers to have more influence on the functioning of vocational education, introduce new tools for forecasting the demand for graduates in VET professions on the labour market, new core curricula adjusted to the needs of particular sectors, organisational and financial incentives for preparing students to attain market qualifications and sectoral licenses.

As a result of these VET reforms, requalifying is much easier. Each of the qualifications distinguished in an occupation can be attained separately. Having been awarded one qualification, the learner can continue to attain competences within the same profession or a related one. Some of the qualifications distinguished in the professions are common for various professions.

2.2.3. Higher education

Since 2014, all higher education institutions must allow access to a study programme⁷ on the basis of the validation of non-formal and informal learning. A new law on higher education and science narrowed this requirement to higher education institutions that fulfil certain requirements.

This path is open to:

1. persons who have a secondary school diploma and at least five years of professional experience – when applying for a first cycle or a uniform master's degree programme,
2. persons who have a licentiate ("licencjat") or equivalent degree and at least three years of professional experience after completing first cycle studies – when applying for a second cycle degree programme,
3. persons who have a full qualification at level 5 of the Polish Qualifications Framework or a qualification referenced to level 5 of the European Qualifications Framework and was awarded by a foreign higher education system – when applying for a second cycle degree programme,
4. persons who have a master's degree ("magister") or equivalent and at least two years of professional experience after completing the second cycle or uniform master's degree studies – when applying for the next field of study in a first cycle or second cycle programme or a uniform master's degree programme.

⁷ Each study programme must comply with the appropriate descriptors for academically- or practically-oriented first or second cycle qualifications in one of eight broad areas of study (humanities, social sciences, exact sciences, life sciences, agricultural sciences, engineering and technology, medical and health sciences, veterinary sciences and fine arts), defined by the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education. This framework, in turn, complies with the Polish Qualifications Framework. More information can be found in Marciniak (2013). As of 2018, a new classification of areas of study has been introduced – more in line with the OECD classification.

No more than 50% of ECTS points assigned to a given education programme in a specific field, level and profile of studies may be awarded as the result of the validation of non-formal and informal learning. For this reason, the validation process does not directly lead to certification in higher education.

The number of students admitted to higher education institutions in this way cannot exceed 20% of the total number of students in a given field, level and profile of education.

The recognition of learning outcomes is conducted by commissions set up for this purpose, which examine the actual skills, social competences and knowledge of the individual, not just the documents submitted by a person. The assessment process is based on learning outcomes specified in the curriculum for a given field, level and profile of studies.

Areas excluded from this procedure are medical studies, veterinary medicine, architecture and teaching (Lewicki, 2016).

It is worth noting that the Law on Higher Education established in 2005 has been recently replaced by the Act of 20 July 2018, which took force in October 2018. The new regulations did not introduce any major changes in the area of the recognition of learning outcomes, except for defining the licentiate (“licencjat”) and master’s degree (“magister”) or equivalent degrees mentioned in the criteria above in terms of PQF levels (6 and 7 respectively), as well as providing the same opportunities that secondary school diplomaed graduates have to learners with a PQF level 5 qualification.

2.2.4. Costs for individuals and funding mechanisms

There is a fee for each extramural examination taken in a given session in the classes listed in the core curriculum and for the extramural vocational examination. In 2018, it was approximately 40 EUR. When an extramural vocational examination is re-taken, the fee is:

- 1/3 of the amount cited above for the written part of the examination,
- 2/3 of the amount cited above for the practical part of the examination.

In the case of validation in higher education, according to the Law on Higher Education and Science of 2018, each higher education institution can collect fees for the procedure of confirming the learning outcomes attained by way of non-formal and informal learning. The amount of the fee and the way it is calculated are determined individually by each higher education institution.

2.3. Statutory qualifications

Statutory qualifications are established by separate regulations and are awarded in accordance with the principles set forth in those regulations – as such, they differ in size, awarding bodies, validation and quality assurance arrangements, as well as in target groups and fees (and exemptions from fees).

In 2013, there were over 180 statutory qualifications in 10 different areas of government administration, ranging from health to the maritime economy (Sławiński et al., 2017).

An overview of statutory qualifications based on an analysis conducted by IBE in 2012–2013 shows that in most cases one had to complete a specific training or teaching programme in order to be eligible for validation. Sometimes the opportunity to proceed with validation depended on completing a mandatory apprenticeship. In some cases it was possible to obtain an exemption from these conditions, usually after completing other specific training or education programmes, demonstrating certain knowledge or practical experience, or attaining other qualifications. Compulsory training or completing an apprenticeship was not required for only a few identified statutory qualifications. The predominant form of validation was the traditional examination.

It is worth noting that the procedures for issuing a formal document confirming the attainment of a given statutory qualification were varied as well. In some cases, the exact moment of awarding a qualification was not clearly defined. Sometimes, legal regulations explicitly indicated that the individual receives a document with a specific name (e.g. a certificate), in other cases, they ended with the statement that an exam report was to be prepared. Some legal acts contained templates of documents confirming the attainment of a qualification, others only specified their content or had no related information whatsoever (Sławiński et al., 2017, p. 56).

2.4. Market qualifications

Market qualifications are a new type of qualification introduced by the IQS Act. Unlike qualifications awarded within formal education and statutory qualifications, they are not regulated by any other legal provisions except for the IQS Act. This sets them apart in many aspects, including validation.

First, market qualifications can be developed by any entity implementing organised activities in an area of the economy, labour market, education or training. This arrangement stems from one of the basic premises of the system, according to which the IQS should be able to respond quickly to economic, technological and labour market changes. At the same time, market qualifications are included in the system by the decision of the relevant minister, supported by consultations with stakeholders, and only after meeting the standard for describing qualifications defined by the IQS Act. As such, a market qualification becomes public property and its awarding process must be controlled by an internal and external quality assurance process (see section 4.3.).

Second, the introduction of market qualifications was intended to facilitate the ability of all persons to attain qualifications as conveniently as possible, in different places and at different times, and to have them widely recognised.

One of the prerequisites of this is to properly define the requirements for validation as part of the aforementioned qualification description standard, in order to provide opportunities to confirm learning outcomes regardless of how they were obtained – whether by learning at school, taking courses or learning independently on one's own.

The IQS Act specifies that market qualifications can be awarded only after attaining a positive result of validation, where validation is defined as *assessing whether a person seeking to have a qualification awarded has attained a distinct part or all of the learning outcomes required for that qualification, regardless of the person's learning path* (Article 2, § 22). Consequently, the awarding of a market qualification, i.e. certification, has been defined as *the process by which a learner, after having achieved a positive validation result, receives a formal document from an authorised awarding body stating that a qualification has been awarded* (Article 2, § 1).

The authorisation to certify a given market qualification existing in the IQS is granted by the relevant minister under an administrative decision, but not before an external quality assurance entity is assigned to this qualification. The authorisation can be obtained by any entity conducting business activities that meets the criteria set forth in the IQS Act. This means that one market qualification can be awarded by many, potentially unrelated institutions charging for validation. This arrangement is intentional, as every institution granted certification authority has a degree of discretion in planning and performing validation and certification. As a result, it can implement its proprietary solutions in this area and consistently improve them.

At the same time, awarding bodies are directly responsible for validation and certification, and can have their certification authority revoked if serious irregularities are found. This is also the case when an awarding body authorises another entity to validate learning outcomes. Furthermore, to be granted the authority to certify, every entity conducting business activities must ensure the organisational and staffing conditions required to properly perform validation.

These validation requirements result from the nature of the learning outcomes that need to be attained in order to be awarded a given qualification. As stated above, they are part of the description standard set by the IQS Act for every market qualification formally included in the system. The standard requires the following main conditions to be met:

- the qualification must be described in the language of learning outcomes and provide the assessment criteria,
- the requirements for validation are provided,
- a PQF level is assigned.

These requirements serve as the basis for the proper planning, preparation and performance of validation in each awarding body. Compliance with these requirements by various institutions awarding the same qualification is aimed at ensuring the reliability and comparability of the validation results, that is, the quality of the validation itself. Hence these requirements are an important point of reference for the external quality assurance entities evaluating the validation and certification processes conducted by awarding bodies (see section 4.3).

Depending on the scope and degree of complexity of the qualification, the requirements can be defined at different levels of detail, but they should not form an exhaustive description of the validation procedure that would unjustifiably restrict access to becoming an awarding body. Each awarding body develops and follows its own validation scenarios, taking these requirements into account.

Validation requirements may be specified for the whole qualification or separately for each set of learning outcomes as needed. Validation requirements can also be supplemented with guidelines for the entities that plan, prepare and perform validation.

Box 1. Validation requirements for qualifications attained outside the formal education system.

The law does not explicitly state what the requirements for validation should encompass. However, guidelines prepared by the Educational Research Institute, e.g. *The Validation of Learning Outcomes in Poland – New Opportunities for Attaining Qualifications* (Gmaj et al., 2017), propose that the requirements should:

- take into account the specific characteristics of the qualification and the needs of the individuals undergoing validation – the requirements must reflect the learning outcomes specified for the given qualification and the assessment criteria assigned to them; in addition, they should not limit access to qualifications because of an individual’s disability or learning path, especially when this includes informal learning;
- set boundary conditions under which validation should be conducted – the requirements should include general information indicating the validation conditions to be met by each awarding body to ensure the quality of validation; they should not favour or exclude any potential awarding body; by specifying the validation requirements, minimum standards are established to prevent undesirable practices; providing detailed information at the stage of describing a qualification may be justified in exceptional cases by the specificity of the qualification and the needs of the persons undergoing validation;
- refer to the validation stages: identification, documentation and assessment of learning outcomes;
- answer the following questions regarding validation: How? Who? Under what conditions? This means referring to:
 - validation methods,
 - competences of the staff conducting validation,
 - organisational and material conditions needed for this process.

The guidebook suggests a standard structure for presenting the aforementioned information and advises on the critical areas that need to be covered. In relation to validation methods, the guidebook proposes a typology of methods, describes different factors that need to be taken into account when choosing methods for identifying, documenting and assessing learning outcomes, and recommends combining many methods within one validation process (triangulation). This aspect of validation is covered in greater detail in the *Catalogue of Validation Methods* developed by IBE (see section 4.3.).

Similarly, the guidebook covers general requirements concerning the most important roles in the validation process, that is, the role of the validation advisor and assessor.

Source: Article 15 of the IQS Act; Gmaj et al. (2017).

In some cases, the relevant minister can, if needed, formulate additional requirements for awarding bodies resulting from the specific characteristics of the given qualification relating to quality assurance mechanisms. These additional requirements may pertain to the scope and frequency of:

- the internal evaluation conducted by the awarding bodies,
- the activity reports submitted by awarding bodies to the relevant minister,
- the external quality assurance reports prepared by external quality assurance entities (Articles 25 and 38 of the IQS Act).

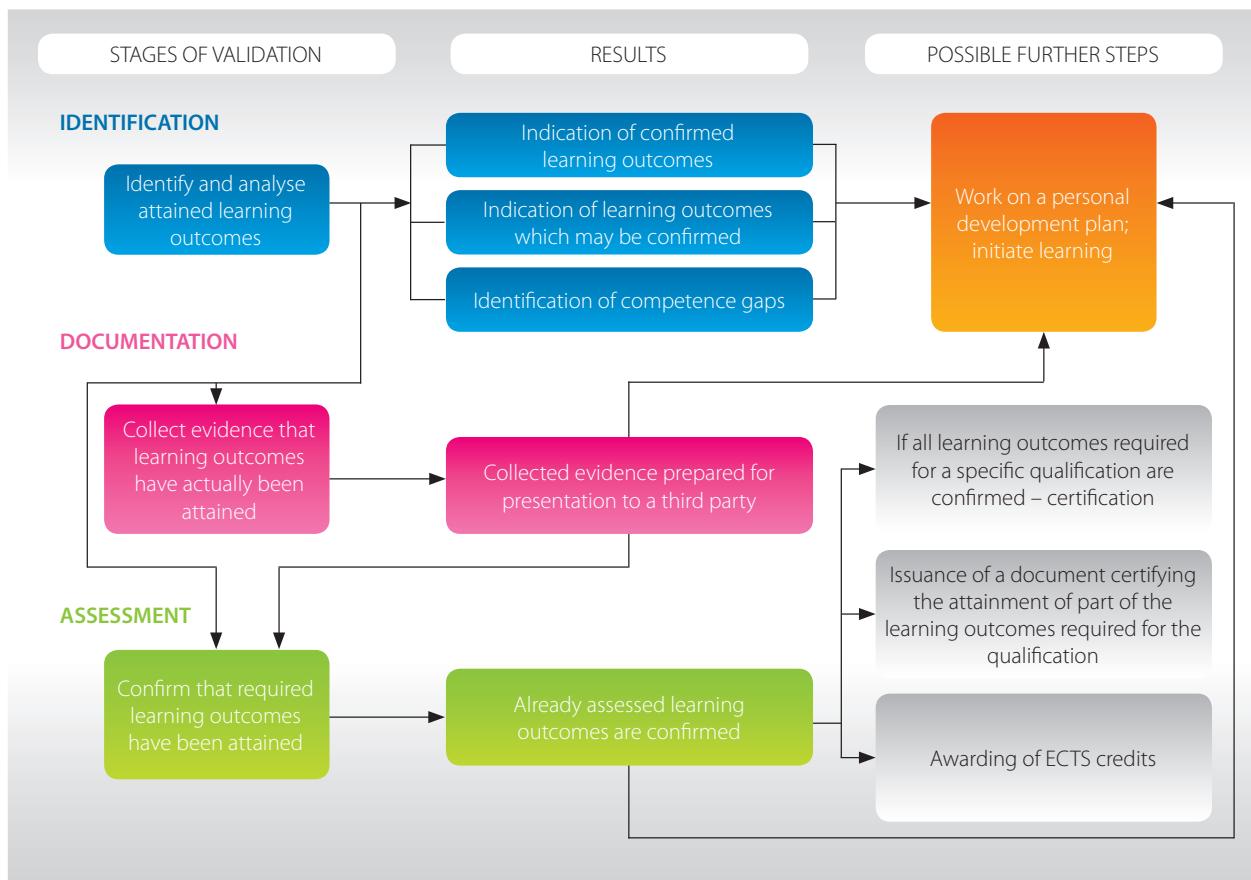
More information about this and other quality assurance solutions implemented by the IQS Act can be found in section 4.3.

2.4.1. Validation stages

Each awarding body designs the validation procedure based on the validation requirements specified in the description of a given qualification. Three stages are recommended: identification, documentation and assessment of learning outcomes. However, not all the stages are mandatory. In fact, the IQS Act refers only to the assessment stage as a mandatory part of validation.

An awarding body is obliged to conduct the identification and documentation stages only if they are specified in the validation requirements stated in the description of a given qualification. Otherwise, it is up to each awarding body to decide whether these stages should be included in the validation process. A detailed diagram of the three validation stages is presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Diagram of the stages of validation.



Source: Educational Research Institute.

The distinction of the three validation stages is in line with the 2012 Council Recommendation. It is, however, worth noting that certification, understood as the last stage of validation in the Council Recommendation and the European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning (Cedefop, 2015), has been defined in the IQS as a distinct process, rather than one of the stages of validation. This definition is a way to accommodate specific cases of qualification awarding arrangements present in Poland (e.g. the process of awarding a driver's licence), in which separate institutions are responsible for validation and certification.

2.4.2. Costs for individuals and funding mechanisms

The IQS Act does not regulate the cost of validation to the learner. Each awarding body decides individually if the person will be required to pay fees and if so – their amount. At the same time, all awarding bodies are obligated to pay 3% of the fees they earn for validation and certification to the government every quarter; therefore, it is predicted that the validation of market qualifications will rarely be free of charge.

The costs relating to the tasks performed for the IQS by government administration are covered by the state budget, which is supplemented by the mandatory fees introduced by the IQS Act, presented in Table 1. All fees are paid to a bank account indicated by the minister coordinator of the IQS and used in accordance with his/her decisions.

Table 1. Costs defined in the IQS Act.

For what?	Cost	Who pays?
Application to the relevant minister via the IQR Portal to include a market qualification	2 000 zł (~500 EUR)	Submitting body
Application to the relevant minister via the IQR Portal to become an awarding body	10 000 zł (~2 500 EUR) 5 000 zł* (~1 250 EUR)	Applicant entity
Quarterly payment from fees earned from validation and certification	3%**	Awarding Body
Application to the minister-coordinator to be listed as an External Quality Assurance Body	2 000 zł	Applicant entity

* If this is the same entity that applied to have a qualification included in the IQS

** But not less than 1 zł for each document issued that certifies an awarded market qualification

Source: Educational Research Institute.

Currently, individuals can in some cases cover validation fees as beneficiaries of selected services listed in the National Development Services Database operated by the Polish Agency for Enterprise Development (*Polska Agencja Rozwoju Przedsiębiorczości*, PARP). As of September 2019, schools will be allowed to cover the fees of students applying for a market qualification (only once) based on a contract between the school and the awarding body.

3. Support to individuals

Providing guidance is one of the key aspects of validation solutions aimed at supporting lifelong learning policies. Despite the lack of provisions in the IQS Act directly referring to vocational guidance, other legally regulated solutions already functioning in Poland are intended to help people in identifying and documenting learning outcomes in accordance with the 2012 Council Recommendation.

These solutions relate mainly to the labour market and the formal education system. They have a long history and function in different contexts, and as such, they utilise many different frameworks, for example, in reference to what is being in fact identified and documented – besides learning outcomes (which are a relatively new tool in vocational guidance), competences, predispositions, motivations, etc. are also measured. The same applies to diagnostic methods, databases of qualifications/occupations, the possible results of the guidance process, and so on.

Vocational guidance in Poland is provided in many areas, including through:

1. Public activities promoting employment and supporting the labour market implemented by the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy;
2. Vocational guidance in formal education implemented by the Ministry of National Education;
3. Validation for the market qualifications included in the IQS, which is overseen by the relevant minister for a given qualification.

3.1. Public activities promoting employment and supporting the labour market

Vocational guidance is one of the most important public activities promoting employment. It provides support in solving career challenges, such as assistance in choosing a profession or changing it, supplementing qualifications, diagnosing learning outcomes and planning professional development, along with job placement and training provision.

The primary labour market institutions responsible for the provision of vocational guidance include:

- public employment services – established by employment agencies together with county and regional labour offices;
- Voluntary Labour Corps – a state unit specialised in supporting youth at risk of social exclusion and unemployed persons under 25 years of age;
- employment agencies – entities listed in a special register of institutions providing job placement services, vocational counselling, personal counselling or temporary work.

Additionally, guidance may be offered by:

- training institutions – public and non-public entities operating in the field of non-formal education,
- social dialogue institutions – trade unions, trade union organisations, employers' organisations, organisations of unemployed persons, as well as non-governmental organisations involved in activities relating to employment promotion, mitigating the effects of unemployment, and professional activation, as enumerated in their statutes;
- local partnership institutions – groups of institutions implementing activities and projects supporting the labour market.

3.1.1. Public employment services

Vocational guidance in the public employment services consists of providing assistance in choosing the right profession or place of work and in planning career development. Such services also help people in preparing to better cope with searching for jobs and employment, in particular by:

- providing information about occupations, the national and European labour market, training and education opportunities, as well as the skills needed to actively look for work or undertake self-employment;
- providing counselling on the use of standardised methods of facilitating the choice of a profession, starting or changing jobs, including examining one's learning outcomes, interests and professional talents;
- directing people to specialised psychological and medical exams to secure opinions on one's suitability for work in a profession or direction of training;
- providing guidance for unemployed persons and job seekers.

The most important principles of public employment services are:

- accessibility;
- its voluntary nature;
- equal treatment regardless of gender, age, disability, race, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, political beliefs, religious denomination or trade union membership;
- freedom to choose a profession and place of employment.

The guidance is free-of-charge, confidential (personal data is protected) and can be provided in an individual or group setting.

In 2016, the public employment service included 340 county labour offices and 16 regional labour offices with branches. Each regional labour office has a career information and planning centre, supporting the county labour offices in conducting vocational guidance, including the provision of remote counselling services using tele-information systems⁸.

Among the groups eligible to benefit from vocational guidance are unemployed persons registered in labour offices, unregistered persons (eligible for a slightly narrower scope of services) and national employers. The latter can receive assistance with selecting job candidates and the professional development of the employer or his/her employees.

Vocational guidance (and validation) can also be aimed at economically inactive persons⁹, i.e. those who are not seeking a job or who are not ready to become employed. While the reasons for this might include retirement, education and training, illness or disabilities that prevent them from working, there are still over 2 million people who were either discouraged or who have family and household responsibilities preventing them from seeking a job (Statistics Poland, 2018, p.193). The process of providing vocational guidance, which enables a person to plan his/her professional future, including making decisions about choosing or changing a profession, training or retraining, is based, among others, on identifying person's learning outcomes. The diagnostic methods, techniques and tools used may also be aimed at determining a client's personal preferences and potential (e.g. psychological tests, personality and interest tests), personal and social competences (e.g. NBK – an IT tool for assessing competences), vocational interests and predispositions (e.g. KZZ – occupational interest questionnaire).

Various databases are also used in the consulting process, including the classification of professions and specialties, national qualification/vocational qualification descriptions and a register of training institutions. It is anticipated that the Integrated Qualification Register will also supplement these sources of information.

8 The county labour office may refer an unemployed person to an information and career planning centre at the regional labour office or to another labour market institution in order to diagnose his/her problems in gaining employment and to help in career planning.

9 The official definition of the economically inactive population characterises them as persons aged 15 years or more, who were not classified as employed or unemployed, i.e. persons who during the reference week:

- did not work and were not job seekers,
- did not work and were job seekers, but were not ready to start a job within two weeks after the reference week,
- did not work and were not job seekers because they had found a job and were waiting to start it:
 - within a period that was longer than 3 months
 - within a period that was not longer than 3 months, but they were unable to take the job (Statistics Poland, 2018, p.209).

Box 2. Career Audit in the Małopolska Region

The Career Audit is a counselling service offered by the Vocational Career Information and Planning Centre of the Regional Labour Office in Kraków as part of a project entitled This Way to a Career (Kierunek Kariera) co-financed by the European Social Fund of the European Union.

The aim of this project is to develop the competences of adults who are interested in acquiring new skills, in confirming their learning outcomes or attaining qualifications. The project is premised on including all participants in the Career Audit, which is the basis for determining the type of training services that the person will be able to use (through a training voucher), the opportunity to confirm learning outcomes and attain qualifications.

This Way to a Career is addressed to working people who live, work or study in the Małopolska Region, are over 25 years of age and have low-level qualifications, i.e. have completed education at the level of general or vocational upper secondary school (up to having passed the matura school leaving examination) or are over 50 years of age, regardless of their level of education. Working people aged 18–25 years with low-level qualifications can also participate in the project. As of June 2017, project services can be used by farmers and foreigners.

The objectives of participating in the project are determined together with a vocational counsellor at the beginning of the guidance process.

Persons who have specific educational or professional plans participate in a basic version of the Career Audit. It is aimed at identifying the learning outcomes a person already has in a selected field and determining whether it is possible to confirm these learning outcomes and attain qualifications, primarily by setting a training goal. Basic Career Audit services are conducted during a single meeting with a vocational counsellor. The project participant receives feedback about the educational and vocational goal adopted for implementation.

A more extensive, in-depth Career Audit is provided to those people who want to find out the area in which they can develop. This is done by analysing their previous educational and professional experiences as well as their interests and aspirations. An in-depth service is based on the Skills Audit Method created by IBE and the Vocational Career Information and Planning Centre in Kraków as part of piloting the IQS (see section 4.3.2.). The in-depth Career Audit is provided over several meetings with a vocational counsellor. The outcome of this process is to diagnose the participant's skills and prepare an individual development plan. The development plan, together with extensive feedback for the project participant that includes a list of identified competences in addition to the adopted aim to be accomplished, constitutes part of the project participant's portfolio. Participation in the guidance process should last no longer than 6 months.

February 2016 to November 2017, 4287 Career Audits were conducted, including 560 in-depth ones.

Source: IBE, Project Kierunek Kariera <https://kierunek.pociagdokariery.pl/>

Labour market services implemented by county labour offices and career information and planning centres operating in regional labour offices are provided by specialists employed in "key positions" that comprise 44.3% of all

employees in employment offices¹⁰. They act as client advisors tasked with overseeing the assistance being provided to unemployed persons or job seekers, in particular profiling the client, preparing and overseeing the implementation of an individual action plan, providing individual forms of basic labour market services, and facilitating access to other forms of assistance.

Persons employed in key positions in the labour offices must meet minimum qualifying requirements. For example, a vocational counsellor must have completed higher education and have at least 12 months of vocational counselling experience. In addition, vocational counsellors are required to improve their professional qualifications, in particular by participating in the modular training programmes for civil service human resources staff. It is worth noting that in 2016, one county labour office worker in a key position was working with an average of 143 unemployed persons, including 154 per one client advisor and 676 unemployed persons per one vocational counsellor.

Guidance offered by the public employment services to economically inactive persons is facilitated by the National Action Plan for Employment for 2018 (*Krajowy Plan Działań na rzecz Zatrudnienia na rok 2018*). Additionally, there are many initiatives aimed at reintegrating economically inactive persons in the labour market. This is often within the framework of projects conducted by public employment services, but also by private firms and NGOs functioning at the local and regional levels. They can be funded, among others, by Regional Operational Programmes, which are aimed at implementing the national medium-term development strategy (which, in turn, must be consistent with the national development strategy)¹¹.

3.1.2. Voluntary Labour Corps

The Voluntary Labour Corps (VLC) offers young people over 15 years of age, who are not in education and have not graduated from lower secondary school, the possibility to attain vocational qualifications or to supplement their education¹² in one of 216 Corps agencies. Each year, over 800,000 young people receive various forms of help from VLC.

Guidance and counselling services are provided by specialised staff of their labour market units: Mobile Vocational Information Centres and Youth Career Centres. The Mobile Centres have teams of 2 counsellors providing counselling sessions and workshops in small cities and towns. They are invited by school directors or teachers from places where no such services are available. The Mobile Centres are a unique and very popular form of service among schools and other institutions. Youth Career Centres, on the other hand, are stationary units focusing on entrepreneurship and self-employment, as well as on helping to manage one's educational and professional career.

10 They include: job placement workers (4489 persons were employed in this position in 2016, Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy, 2017), vocational counsellors (2210 persons), professional development specialists (910 persons) and programme specialists (2381 persons). 54 EURES network staff persons working in the regional labour offices were also among the persons employed in key positions in 2016.

11 Regional Operating Programmes (ROP) are prepared by the executive boards of the regions in cooperation with the Minister of Regional Development. The draft must be preceded by an evaluation report containing an analysis of the effectiveness and efficiency of the previous ROP. It is adopted by a resolution of the regional board.

12 The VLC provides training in over 60 professions, both in their own workshops or as on-the-job training with an employer.

Young people can participate in group or individual counselling sessions and make use of information on professions, the labour market, educational pathways, skills assessments and occupational predisposition tests.

Box 3. Individual Career Project – Portfolios for Youth

The service offered by VLC includes creating an individual action plan, which can be further elaborated by the client as he/she progresses in his educational and professional development.

An Individual Career Project Package includes:

- a manual for the vocational counsellor describing the methodology;
- a Career Portfolio – a tool to be worked on independently by a student or graduate that helps to gather and organise information on personal achievements, prepare a development plan and monitor its implementation;
- a self-evaluation questionnaire for a student or graduate;
- a battery of tests (occupational interest test, test of values, test of life experiences, motivation test, entrepreneurial aptitude test).

Source: Voluntary Labour Corps https://ohp.pl/?page_id=661

3.2. Vocational guidance in formal education

3.2.1. General education and vocational education and training

In accordance with prevailing legal regulations, the education system in Poland must ensure that students are prepared to choose a profession and field of study, provide the conditions for the development of students' interests and aptitudes, as well as enable adults to complete general education and attain qualifications.

Vocational counselling provided by the education system is offered primarily in schools (where it is mandatory), psychological and pedagogical counselling centres and in continuing education institutions.

It is worth noting that the vocational guidance system implemented in schools has been recently revised and expanded, based, among others, on the recommendations prepared by the Centre for Education Development (*Ośrodek Rozwoju Edukacji*) as part of the “Effective educational and vocational guidance for children, youth and adults” project (2016–2018). A legal change in February 2019 made vocational guidance mandatory in all public and non-public schools and in all forms of pre-school education. The regulation specifies that every education facility should cover all activities relating to vocational guidance, determine responsibilities and describe the methods, forms and schedule for the implementation of individual activities, including parents’ involvement.

Pedagogical and psychological counselling centres provide assistance to children and youth in choosing educational pathways and a profession, and assist teachers, groups of class tutors or specialists in planning and implementing activities in vocational guidance. Counselling is provided by vocational counsellors and teacher-career advisors.

Continuing education institutions (continuing education centres and practical education centres) can provide vocational guidance in the field of adult education and training with the participation of vocational counsellors.

Box 4. Local Centres of Knowledge and Education for the educational activation of adults (LCKE)

Local Centres of Knowledge and Education (*Lokalne Ośrodki Wiedzy i Edukacji*) organise and initiate non-formal and informal learning for adults in school facilities and are funded by an open nationwide grant competition. Although the activities of LCKE are addressed to adults, it is included among the objectives of the school education system, in particular to support the role of family education, reducing differences in education, development and care conditions among the country’s individual regions, especially between metropolitan and rural areas, and provide opportunities for adults to supplement their general education or attain or change their professional and specialist qualifications.

LCKEs use the school’s potential to conduct adult education activities in developing key competences, including those needed in the labour market, and to provide school staff with the methods and tools of teaching adults, especially in small local communities and disadvantaged areas.

The activities of LCKEs are intended to increase the participation of adults in education by activating and involving people who have thus far been passive and have not participated in any organised forms of continuing education. The role of the school in the LCKE model is to organise, inspire and coordinate the active involvement of the school itself and various entities, organisations and individuals (e.g. local leaders) in social, educational and community activities. These activities are to develop the competences of local community members, especially those who are less able to negotiate social and professional relations.

The LCKE model is premised on profiling its offer in a way that responds to the individual needs of the participants, including needs relating to functioning in the labour market. A diagnosis of the social environment, identifying its needs and aspirations, serves as the basis for designing the offer and selecting the working methods. LCKE's offer should focus on developing key IT, social and civic, entrepreneurial and professional competences in adults. The catalogue of activities can be extended to other competences corresponding to the specific local needs identified at the needs assessment stage.

The pilot implementation of the LCKE Model in fifteen locations from January 2017 to June 2018 included developing the organisational and functional frameworks for establishing and operating such educational activation centres for adults in the future.

Source: Educational Research Institute.

3.2.2. Higher education

Vocational guidance is also offered within higher education in academic career offices – units promoting the professional activation of students and graduates, operated by a university or student organisation. Their tasks include providing students and graduates with information about the labour market and opportunities to improve their professional qualifications, help in shaping one's career path, identifying competence gaps and addressing them, choosing job search methods, as well as help in actively searching for jobs. As of June 2015, there were about 340 academic career offices (Banaszak, 2015) in Poland (for a total number of 428 higher education institutions).

3.3. Guidance and market qualifications

As mentioned earlier, the IQS Act does not contain provisions referring directly to guidance itself, however, proposed solutions concerning this aspect of validation are recommended by the Educational Research Institute to institutions describing and awarding market qualifications (Gmaj et al., 2017).

Furthermore, the IQS Act does ensure several important elements supporting the individual, including:

- access to information about all market qualifications through the Integrated Qualifications Register,
- access to information about the validation process performed in a given awarding body through the awarding body's web page,
- the possibility of accumulating credits and having them recognised in stages, although this solution is not obligatory and can be implemented at the discretion of the awarding bodies.

Providing direct guidance to persons undergoing validation is especially important when the identification and documentation stages are part of the process. Both of these stages can be challenging for an individual: identification

in terms of becoming aware of one's competences, taking stock of them, describing them as learning outcomes and comparing them to qualification requirements, and documentation – in terms of collecting relevant evidence and presenting it to a third party for assessment.

Documenting learning outcomes is strongly linked to the portfolio method, but support at the identification stage can play an important role regardless of the assessment methods used. Defining the learning outcomes acquired by a person before he/she begins the assessment stage improves the course of validation and increases one's chances of attaining the qualification.

In accordance with the recommendations prepared by IBE (see Box 1, section 2.4.), the validation requirements for market qualifications should refer to all three stages of the process, including the identification and documentation of learning outcomes, especially if the portfolio method will be used. Furthermore, the requirements should include the provisions for individuals undergoing validation (e.g. professional guidance), as well as identify the roles performed by validation practitioners in the process (e.g. present their advisor), present their competence profiles and the rules for updating these competences.

Box 5. The competence profile of a validation advisor

While developing the initial arrangements for a qualification system in Poland and piloting the system, IBE, in partnership with the Vocational Career Information and Planning Centre of the Regional Labour Office in Kraków, analysed the experiences of professional counsellors. On this basis, a proposal for the competence profile of a validation advisor, whose role is to support persons undergoing validation at all stages of the process, was developed.

A validation advisor shall:

- understand the goals of validation,
- be knowledgeable about validation,
- be knowledgeable about education and awarding bodies as well as labour market institutions and the services they offer, be able to retrieve new information,
- be able to use methods and tools to identify and document competences,
- know the principles of confirming evidence of the attainment of learning outcomes,
- be able to work with others – be open-minded, unbiased, be an active listener, a communicator and know how to motivate people,
- observe high standards of professional ethics,
- have professional experience in the sector represented by the qualifications that will be the focus of the guidance,

- know the required learning outcomes and their assessment criteria for the qualifications that will be the focus of the guidance,
- be knowledgeable about the methods and tools used to assess the required learning outcomes, as well as the criteria for the assessment of the formal aspects and content of the evidence certifying the attainment of the learning outcomes required for the qualifications that are the focus of the guidance.

Source: Gmaj et al., 2017.

Defining the manner of performing validation guidance and providing information to the individual undergoing validation is a key element of the internal quality assurance system, whose development and implementation is required by law of all awarding bodies and entities authorised by awarding bodies to perform validation.

Box 6. The quality assurance principles of awarding qualifications pertaining to services for individuals undergoing validation.

While developing the initial arrangements for a qualifications system in Poland and piloting the system, IBE prepared recommendations for awarding bodies on the quality assurance of validation, by formulating the following principles:

- Persons seeking the qualification shall be able to have questions and doubts answered about validation and certification at each stage of the qualification's awarding process.
- At the time of registration, a person should know which preceding qualifications are required for the qualification being attained, as well as any required conditions other than having its learning outcomes validated.
- At the time of registration, a person should have full knowledge of the validation process, especially about the learning outcomes, their assessment criteria and requirements.
- Persons shall be informed appropriately beforehand about the organisational details of validation (i.e. time, place, cost).
- Persons shall obtain unambiguous and full information about the outcome of each stage of the qualification's awarding process, not only about the results, but also information about which competences need to be supplemented. The time within which an institution is obliged to provide such information shall be clearly defined. The consequences of a given result shall be clearly indicated (i.e. the next stage of the process, the possibility of repeating a specific stage or the entire assessment process, the appeals process, etc.).

All information about awarding a qualification provided to a person shall be formulated and conveyed in a manner that is adapted to the needs of the recipient.

Source: Bacia et al., 2015.

4. Capacity building and quality assurance

The quality assurance system in formal education reflects the principles and standards presented in the Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union on the EQF (2008), as well as other European documents and guidelines relating to this issue¹³. However, the quality assurance measures for awarding qualifications outside the formal education system do not always fully meet these standards. One important aim of the IQS is to extend systemic solutions for quality assurance to all qualifications included in the IQS, regardless of their origin. In this way, all qualifications listed in the IQR will be subject to uniform quality assurance requirements, consistent with European guidelines.

4.1. Qualifications awarded in formal education

4.1.1. General education and vocational education and training

All schools in the formal general and vocational education system have external quality assurance (as part of the pedagogical supervision system) and internal quality assurance (performed annually) systems in place. They are focused mainly on the teaching process. All evaluations, audits and forms of support are performed in accordance with the law.

A key element in ensuring and improving the quality of education and the qualifications attained in school is the system of external examinations. They are organised by eight Regional Examination Boards and supervised by the Central Examination Board.

The Central Examination Board's tasks include preparing examination materials, setting assessment guidelines, printing and distributing the materials and examination sheets, analysing examination results for the purpose of further research, and submitting reports on the aggregated results to the Minister of National Education on an annual basis. Detailed information about the organisation of examinations and necessary provisions, such as examination timetables, additional supplies or equipment, approved computer software or adaptations to the special needs of students, are updated annually and publicly available on the Central Examination Board's website. The Board prepares and publishes data from the examinations, which can be then used to evaluate the results and teaching effectiveness of a given school (e.g. by applying the educational value added method – EVA)¹⁴.

13 For vocational education – *European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET)*, for validation – *European Guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning* (Cedefop, 2009) and for higher education – *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (2015).

14 More details on the use of EVA by the Central Examination Board can be found at <http://ewd.edu.pl/en/indicators/upper-secondary/what-is-an-eva/> [20.11.2017].

On their part, Regional Education Authorities ensure compliance with the aforementioned requirements – its representatives are authorised to evaluate the assessment process and the conditions in which it took place. Only trained examiners registered with the Regional Examination Boards can conduct the assessment. These results are taken into consideration in both external and internal quality assurance as part of pedagogical supervision.

The examiners and other specialists involved in pedagogical supervision have to fulfil a set of requirements and must also take part in periodic training sessions organised by the Minister of National Education.

4.1.2. Higher education

Unlike schools in the formal general and vocational education, higher education institutions are directly responsible for the quality of the awarded qualifications and the study programmes leading to them. They are legally required to operate an internal quality assurance system. The purpose of the external quality assurance system in higher education is primarily to verify the functioning of the internal one. The Minister of Science and Higher Education defines the basic premises of these systems, including:

- the requirements for describing qualifications,
- the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education, which includes descriptions of learning outcomes for eight broad areas of study,
- the organisational requirements for higher education institutions,
- the requirements for study programmes,
- the principles of the programme and institutional assessment of higher education institutions.

Since the validation of learning outcomes in higher education is used mainly as a way of gaining entrance to a study programme, all provisions regarding the quality assurance of the teaching process apply to validation.

Higher education programmes and institutions are required by law to be assessed ex ante and ex post by the Polish Accreditation Committee (*Polska Komisja Akredytacyjna*)¹⁵, which submits the results of its assessments to the Minister of Science and Higher Education. The Committee performs its activities in accordance with the Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (2015). Assessments can also be performed by institutions established by the academic community or by an international accreditation body.

15 The Polish Accreditation Committee is an independent entity, a member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and registered with the European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies (EQAR). It also belongs to the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA), the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEENQA) and the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE).

The accreditation of study programmes and higher education institutions takes into account the following factors:

- the congruency of the learning outcomes determined by the higher education institution for a given study programme with the descriptors for the given field in the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education,
- the ability to attain these learning outcomes given the conditions and the educational process offered,
- the propriety of assessing learning outcomes,
- the operation and improvement of internal quality assurance systems,
- the accreditation or certification of the faculties of the higher education institution received from international institutions,
- the results of previously performed programme accreditation.

The assessment procedure conducted by the Polish Accreditation Committee is free of charge, mandatory and cyclical. In the case of a negative assessment, the Minister of Science and Higher Education revokes or suspends the institution's accreditation to provide higher education. Since the new Law on Higher Education and Science entered into force (Act of 20 July 2018), only the first option is possible.

With the recent introduction of this new law, two new elements were defined – the comprehensive assessment of quality assurance activities in the areas of study provided by the given institution, and the evaluation of the “doctoral schools” established by the new law. The criteria of these assessments are yet to be determined.

4.2. Statutory qualifications

Quality assurance mechanisms for statutory qualifications are as varied as the regulations governing each of these qualifications. The overview of statutory qualifications mentioned in section 2.3. shows that in many cases these regulations include the principles of appointing examination boards and conducting exams. Other quality assurance solutions often relate to the teaching or training process, not validation itself (e.g. by including an accreditation procedure for training providers or a compulsory update of postgraduate education programmes).

Sometimes these regulations define the validity period of qualifications, but not often. In some cases (e.g. nurses), a longer break in professional practice means the loss of the right to practice. When conditions for the restoration of the right to practice are specified, they usually include undergoing additional training. In several cases, an obligation of “continuous professional development” is imposed, but the manner of enforcing this rule is not always determined. No regulations were found to explicitly refer to internal and external quality assurance systems described in the Recommendation on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (Sławiński et al., 2017, p. 56–57).

4.3. Market qualifications

4.3.1. Quality assurance and supervision

The IQS Act introduced new systemic solutions for ensuring the quality of qualifications awarded outside the formal education system. They consist of:

1. standardising the qualification description and consulting with stakeholders and specialists as part of the procedure of including market qualifications in the system (see section 2.4.);
2. providing the internal and external quality assurance of validation and certification as well as the supervision of these processes by the relevant ministers.

Each body awarding a market qualification is required by the IQS Act to have an internal quality assurance system in place, to submit to external evaluations performed by external quality assurance entities and to report to these entities as well as to the relevant minister and the Integrated Qualifications Register operator.

The aim of an awarding body's internal quality assurance system is to ensure that validation and certification are performed properly and being improved. To accomplish this:

- the education and training process is separated from the validation process,
- validation and certification are continuously monitored and assessed,
- validation and certification regularly undergo an internal evaluation (at least once every 3 years for each market qualification that the awarding body is authorised to certify).

The internal evaluation report, which is to be submitted to the external quality assurance entity and the IQR operator, includes:

- an analysis of the documentation on how validation and certification are performed,
- an assessment of the accuracy of the methods and criteria used in meeting the validation requirements specified in the qualification's description,
- information on activities undertaken to improve validation and certification methods,
- information on measures taken to improve the internal quality assurance system.

Additionally, awarding bodies are required to:

- submit activity reports to their relevant ministers at least once every two years,
- submit information to the IQR operator at the end of each quarter on the number of certificates issued, the fees charged for validation and certification and the revenue collected from these fees,
- submit, without delay, information about not meeting the validation requirements pertaining to the competences of the staff performing validation or the organisational and material conditions required for the process to be conducted properly.

The external quality assurance of validation and certification is conducted by institutions chosen to perform this task for a given market qualification by the relevant minister. These institutions are selected from a list of authorised external quality assurance entities. The list is managed by the minister coordinator of the IQS, who announces a call for accepting applications from institutions that would like to join this list at least once every three years¹⁶.

An external quality assurance entity can be an institution or individual conducting business activity that has at least 10 years of experience in conducting organised activities in a field of the economy, the labour market, in education or training. The entity cannot be an awarding body for the qualification whose quality it will be assessing and it must have an internal quality assurance system in place as well as adequately trained personnel.

Appointment as an external quality assurance entity is valid for six years. The minister coordinator of the IQS may extend this period if the entity has performed its assigned functions properly, which is assessed by the relevant minister. The minister coordinator may also inspect the external quality assurance entity on his/her own initiative or in response to a formal request by the relevant minister. Should irregularities be found, the external quality assurance entity is required to correct them or have their appointment revoked.

The external quality assurance entity must submit a report on its external quality assurance activities to the relevant minister at least once every five years. It also prepares recommendations on improving the process of awarding a given qualification by a particular awarding body and on the functioning of its internal quality assurance system.

A market qualification is considered to be functioning in the IQS from the date the agreement for services between the relevant minister and the external quality assurance entity is signed. Also, awarding bodies can begin to award a given qualification from this day.

The main aim of external quality assurance is to support the awarding bodies with continuous capacity building and to improve their solutions pertaining to validation, certification and the internal quality assurance of these processes. Formally, this consists of:

16 The relevant minister for a given qualification appoints an external quality assurance entity by signing an agreement. When choosing an entity, the minister takes into account the effectiveness and rationality of the use of existing resources and the principle of evenly dividing duties among the entities on the list. Additionally, a maximum of five entities from the list can be appointed as the external quality assurance entity for one market qualification. These institutions are required to cooperate in order to ensure a consistent standard of quality for the certification of a given market qualification.

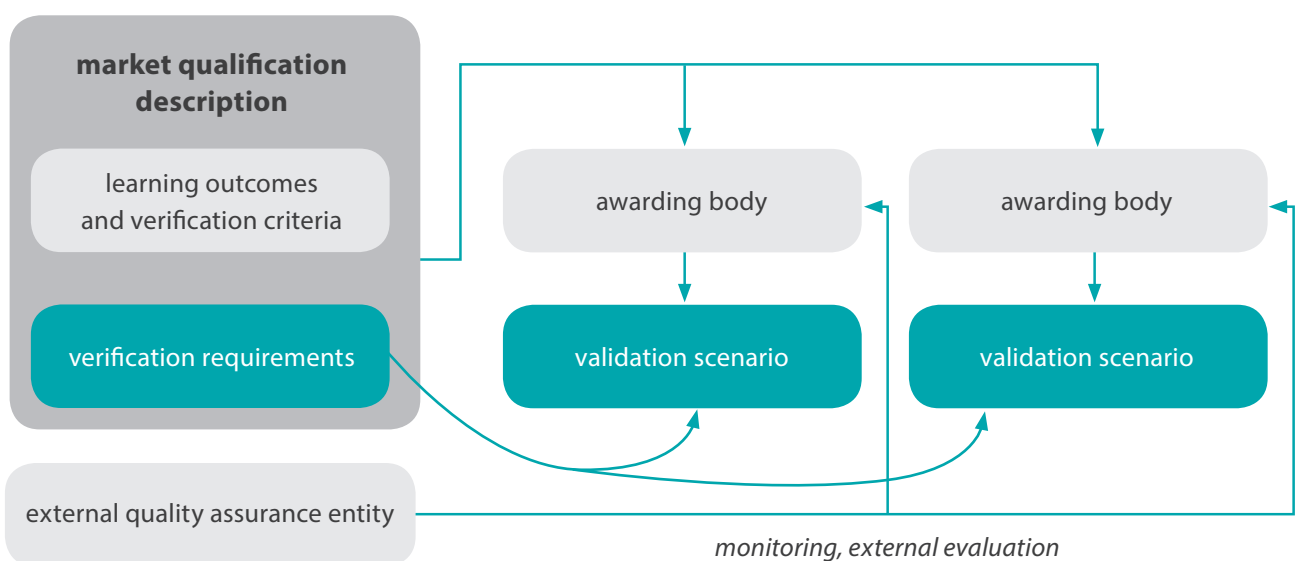
- monitoring the awarding body's internal quality assurance system on the basis of its internal evaluation reports;
- verifying compliance of the awarding body with the validation requirements specified in the description of the market qualification;
- conducting regular external evaluations of validation and certification and of the functioning of the awarding body's internal quality assurance system;
- conducting extra evaluations when required to do so by the relevant minister.

The relevant minister has the power to revoke the authority to award a market qualification based on the results of an external evaluation performed by the external quality assurance entity, when:

- the awarding body issued a certificate to a person who did not achieve a positive validation result;
- the awarding body ceased to comply with additional requirements formulated by the relevant minister or ceased to be a commercial entity;
- the awarding body did not undertake any corrective action after a negative external evaluation was issued;
- an extra external evaluation or inspection revealed gross irregularities within the awarding body.

The important role of the description of the market qualification as a standard for the process of external quality assurance was partially discussed in section 2.4. and is illustrated in Figure 4 below. Every description includes the learning outcomes and the assessment criteria as well as the validation requirements.

Figure 4. The role of the description of market qualifications in external quality assurance.



Source: Educational Research Institute.

As stated earlier, the IQS Act does not strictly regulate the scope of the validation requirements provided in the description of a market qualification. IBE recommends formulating the requirements in a certain way (see Box 1, section 2.4.), but ultimately, the external quality assurance system and the dialogue between the awarding bodies, external quality assurance entities, relevant ministers and the minister coordinator will verify the scope of these requirements.

4.3.2. Support provided by the Educational Research Institute

The Educational Research Institute has played an instrumental role in drafting the referencing report (Sławiński and Dębowski, 2013), as well as in designing the main IQS arrangements and piloting the system between 2010 and 2015. As such, in 2016, it was tasked by the Minister of National Education, or the minister coordinator, with supporting the implementation of the IQS¹⁷. The activities undertaken by IBE include:

- supporting the system’s stakeholders in describing market qualifications and securing the authority to award qualifications or perform external quality assurance;
- supporting the institutions responsible for coordinating and making decisions on the functioning of the system;
- facilitating dialogue between decision makers and stakeholders as well as gathering feedback (e.g. relating to the IQR);
- developing methods, tools and model solutions, as well as manuals and guidelines for different groups of stakeholders;
- conducting research on the implementation of the IQS;
- promoting the IQS by:
 - organising conferences, seminars and other events, as well as providing information on IBEs website, social media, etc.
 - building a presence on a regional level by dispatching “regional advisers” on the IQS.

The implementation of validation arrangements is facilitated by two main types of activities.

First, by the direct involvement of IBE’s experts in describing market qualifications (especially the validation requirements), helping awarding bodies with planning the validation process and presenting it in the form of a “validation scenario”, as well as by assisting external quality assurance entities with developing a conscious approach to the external evaluation of validation.

17 These tasks have been performed within the framework of the following projects: Support to central government administration, awarding bodies and quality assurance institutions in implementing stage I of the Integrated Qualifications System (2016–2018), Including innovative and socially needed qualifications into the Integrated Qualifications System and limiting barriers to IQS development by supporting the system’s stakeholders at the national and regional level (2017–2019), Operating and developing the Integrated Qualification Register (2018–2020).

The validation scenarios referred to above are a precise description of the validation process conducted by a given awarding body. At a minimum, they cover the same elements as the validation requirements specified in a given market qualification's description, but in greater detail and including all relevant procedures. For example, the description of the validation methods includes the specific validation techniques and tools to be applied. The staff requirements are supplemented with additional roles in the process and principles of training practitioners performing validation. The required organisational and material conditions are described in terms of concrete time-frames, the technical parameters of the equipment and premises, registration and payment procedures, the appeals procedure available for the individual undertaking validation, etc. The development of validation scenarios with the support of IBE includes the use of flowcharts as an auxiliary tool, as well as devising a corresponding description of the internal quality assurance system, strictly linked with the validation scenario.

Additionally a series of seminars on validation and quality assurance has been offered in many cities across Poland to the system's stakeholders, mainly institutions planning to become awarding bodies within the IQS. Feedback gathered at these seminars and while supporting awarding bodies in developing validation scenarios, will be used to prepare recommendations on the functioning of awarding bodies within the IQS in the form of a publication.

As the external quality assurance entities play a crucial role in improving validation procedures conducted by the awarding bodies and their understanding of internal quality assurance, IBE promotes an approach based on partnership and dialogue between these institutions. This is done by networking and organising joint meetings that occasionally include the relevant minister's representatives, as well as by encouraging the use of methodologies based on change management, design thinking and service blueprint.

As of December 2018, a total of 140 market qualifications have been described with the support of IBE (11 of which have been already included in the IQS along with 30 qualifications from the Polish Craft System), as well as 10 awarding bodies and 6 external quality assurance entities have received complex assistance from the Institute, although many others have been supported as well. Further support will be granted in 2018–2020.

Validation has also become an important part of developing sectoral qualifications frameworks.

The second type of activity consists of developing publicly available guidelines, methods and tools relating directly to the validation of non-formal and informal learning. The most relevant published guidelines include:

- The Validation of Learning Outcomes in Poland – New Opportunities for Attaining Qualifications (Gmaj et al., 2017). Available in Polish and in English.
- The Quality Assurance of Qualifications in the Integrated Qualifications System. (Bacia et al., 2015). Available in Polish and in English.
- Describing Qualifications Awarded Outside the Formal Education System (Ziewiec-Skokowska, Danowska-Florczyk and Stęchły, 2016). Available in Polish.

As part of piloting the IQS, a method supporting the identification and documentation of learning outcomes, called the Skills Audit Method, has been created in cooperation with specialists from the Vocational Career Information and Planning Centre of the Regional Labour Office in Kraków (Bodzińska-Guzik, Gmaj, Grzeszczak and Leyk, 2015). The method is based on a combination of a biographical and behavioural (competency) interview. A complimentary validation tool called the Skills Audit Sheet has also been developed, as well as a proposed scenario of the method's usage that takes into account the three-stage validation process recommended by IBE. The method has been successfully implemented by the Centre in Kraków as part of a Career Audit service provided via the project *This Way to a Career (Kierunek Kariera)* (see Box 2, section 3.1.1.).

The Skills Audit Method will be further developed with the participation of vocational counsellors as part of implementing stage II of the IQS in 2018–2020. This can prove useful from the point of view of promoting the IQS among vocational counsellors as well as strengthening the links between vocational guidance and the IQS.

The latter opportunity has been directly addressed by IBE, as it is working on the possible integration of the vocation guidance systems operating in Poland to increase the involvement of specialists working in public employment services as well as educational and vocational counsellors in activities conducted on behalf of the IQS. The analyses conducted thus far indicate that the scope of vocational guidance services provided by the public employment services may be similar to the preliminary stages of validation, including the identification and documentation of learning outcomes. Complementing these activities could be, among others, assistance in identifying and documenting learning outcomes in the context of a person undergoing validation for a market qualification and informing clients about the opportunities relating to the IQS and the use of the Integrated Qualifications Register. Developing recommendations on integrating the vocational guidance services operating in Poland will be the subject of further work in 2018–2019.

The studies conducted by IBE included, among others, an evaluation of the process of including qualifications in the IQS and their quality assurance, determining the demand for qualifications in chosen sectors, and examining the labour market institutions and specialists in vocational guidance (see Box 7.).

Box 7. Study of labour market institutions and vocational counsellors.

The study of labour market institutions and educational and vocational counsellors was one of the activities conducted by IBE in 2017–2018. The study consisted of qualitative and quantitative research.

The main objective of the qualitative research was to describe the factors specific to selected institutions and specialists that determine the process of vocational guidance and educational and vocational training, including the challenges they face and the possible use of the IQS in part of their work. The main purpose of the quantitative research was to assess the role of qualifications and the IQS in the provision of public employment services, including the extent to which vocational counsellors adopt the tools offered by the IQS and whether they support their use.

The study's results will be applied by developing guidelines for the dissemination and use of the IQS by various entities, especially for the effective participation of vocational counsellors in activities relating to the IQS and lifelong learning.

Source: Kamieniecka and Maliszewska (2018).

Additionally, IBE developed a set of on-line tools supporting the implementation of validation arrangements in line with the 2012 Council Recommendation. They are publicly available on IBE's website and include:

- **The Database of Good Practices in Validation and Quality Assurance** – a digital repository of case studies developed to serve multiple groups of IQS stakeholders – entities describing market qualifications, awarding bodies and external quality assurance entities. Examples of good practices provide a broad context for the implementation of validation arrangements in Poland; deliver step-by-step information concerning all stages of validation, as well as help in showcasing less common assessment methods (e.g. the portfolio method) and practices relating to validation guidance. The Database comprises two categories of entries: good practices in validation and good practices in quality assurance. All entries on validation have the same structure and are equipped with an interactive validation flowchart serving as a visual aid and navigation tool. Similarly, entries on quality assurance are supplemented by an infographic presenting all essential elements of a given quality assurance system. Each validation case study is based on one chosen qualification and one institution. Currently, the database consists of 10 practices in validation and 3 in quality assurance, most of which are examples from countries that have already successfully implemented interesting validation arrangements (including examples from France, England, Scotland, Iceland, Germany and Holland). The entries are based on contributions from experts in the field of validation and quality assurance. The database will be made available in English. Link: <http://walidacja.ibe.edu.pl/dobrepraktyki/>
- **The Catalogue of Validation Methods** introduces methods used to identify, document and assess learning outcomes. It was developed mainly for entities describing market qualifications and awarding bodies, to provide them with relevant, researched and structured information on validation methods, support them in the process of choosing and combining them as part of one validation process, as well as to establish a common understanding of the terminology relating to this area. The Catalogue proposes a typology of validation methods consisting of ten types of methods and the distinctions between them, techniques and tools. The ten types of methods are: analysis of evidence and statements, skills audit, unstructured and structured debate, observation in real-life and simulated conditions, presentation, theoretical test, unstructured and structured interview. It is composed of two main parts: a description of each method and guidelines supporting the selection of the method for validation purposes, while taking into account the accuracy, reliability and adequacy of the validation results. The description includes the method's strengths and weaknesses, the resources needed to use it, the methods that can be combined with it, the recommended validation stages for its use, the scope of learning outcomes that can be measured with the given method, and examples of its use that refer to the Database of Good Practises. The Catalogue will be available in English. Link: <http://walidacja.ibe.edu.pl/metody/>

- **My Portfolio** (*Moje Portfolio*) is a web application for creating digital portfolios. It was developed both for validation advisers helping individuals with identifying and documenting their learning outcomes and for all users interested in specifying, collecting and organising their competences and various pieces of evidence attesting to the attainment of these competences. In My Portfolio, each user can upload and describe evidence of various kinds (scans of official documents, pictures presenting his/her works, texts, audio and video recordings, etc.) and match them with learning outcomes, which he/she can either select from a list of all learning outcomes recorded in the IQR or name and introduce them autonomously. Each user can also create thematic folders containing selected pieces of evidence matched with learning outcomes (or vice versa) to share them with friends, employers, counsellors or awarding bodies that accept portfolios as a basis for assessment. Users can also add other data to generate a skills-based CV. IBE is looking into the possibility of integrating My Portfolio with other similar tools, e.g. Europass. Link: <http://mojeportfolio.ibe.edu.pl>

Further work on tools to support the development of validation solutions are planned during stage II of the implementation of the IQS in 2018–2020. The Institute is also working on a validation tool designed to assess social competences commonly needed on the labour market, which will take an innovative form inspired by computer games while providing accurate assessment. This work will continue until the end of 2019.

5. Monitoring validation arrangements

5.1. Qualifications awarded in formal education

There are no separate arrangements for monitoring the validation of the learning outcomes of full qualifications. All information is gathered and evaluated within the existing frameworks for monitoring general, vocational and higher education.

As of 2005, the collection and dissemination of data on general and vocational education is conducted by the School Information System. SIS provides information collected under the terms of a legal act. Each school and educational institution must submit relevant data (regarding the number and categories of pupils, teachers, facilities, expenses, etc.) using a web application. This information is collected and maintained by the Ministry of National Education. Each user group (ministries, Statistics Poland, local authorities, scientists, etc.) has access to a certain part of the data base. Some information is available to the public. Additionally, Statistics Poland provides a yearly report *Education and child development (Oświata i wychowanie)* based on the data gathered in SIS, containing a rudimental analysis of this data.

A similar system of gathering data functions within higher education. An integrated system of information about science and higher education includes:

- POL-on – Integrated System of Information about Science and Higher Education,
- PBN – Polish Scholarly Bibliography,
- POL-index – Polish Database of Citations,
- ORPPD – Nationwide Repository of Written Diploma Works.

The system not only facilitates the fulfilment of the reporting requirements of higher education institutions and the assessment process of diploma theses, but also provides data for Statistics Poland, supports the assessment of the quality of higher education and of the scientific potential for funding policies. Data gathered in POL-on, as well as data from the Social Insurance Institution system, are used to study and monitor the careers of graduates through the Polish Graduate Tracking System implemented by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education¹⁸.

As in the case of general and vocational education, Statistics Poland provides a yearly report based mainly on the data gathered in POL-on – *Higher education institutions and their financing (Szkoły wyższe i ich finansowanie)*.

18 For more information, see the website <http://ela.nauka.gov.pl/en/>.

5.2. Market Qualifications

The quality assurance system for market qualifications, especially the various reporting requirements of awarding bodies, ensures that data about the validation and certification process are being collected by the relevant minister, external quality assurance entities and the IQR operator. Internal evaluation reports, activity reports, as well as quarterly information about the number of certificates issued and collected fees and revenues are all sources of this data and the basis on which the external quality assurance entity monitors the awarding body's internal quality assurance system, its compliance with validation requirements and the evaluation of validation and certification.

The IQS has only been implemented for a short time, therefore initial data on its functioning and impact is yet to come. Further developments that could involve a more unified approach to the collection of data and its analysis across the board with the use of the IQR are being planned.

However, because the Educational Research Institute was charged with supporting the minister coordinator in implementing the IQS, it is already taking measures to estimate the impact of current validation arrangements (Królik, 2017). Among others, it is conducting research on:

1. the qualifications functioning in sectors that have developed sectoral qualifications frameworks (banking, IT, sport, telecommunications and tourism), including the quality assurance of their awarding process, thus gauging the possibility of developing new market qualifications and including already existing ones in the IQS,
2. the role of labour market institutions and vocational guidance counsellors in the context of the IQS, including how validation can be used in their day-to-day work (gathering the qualitative data has now been finished),
3. formal education in the context of the IQS, including examination results and educational value added.

6. European transparency tools, credit systems and open educational resources

6.1. The documentation of learning outcomes using European transparency tools

The implementation of European mechanisms and tools, such as qualifications frameworks, the validation of non-formal and informal learning, credit systems (ECTS and ECVET) and transparency tools (Europass) was planned at the development stage of the IQS (Sławiński and Dębowski, 2013). European transparency and recognition tools, such as Europass and Youthpass, have been in use since their development.

Europass

The Europass portfolio consists of a CV, Language Passport, Europass Mobility, Certificate Supplement and Diploma Supplement. Each of them is used in Poland to some degree.

According to the data of the Foundation for the Development of the Education System (*Fundacja Rozwoju Systemu Edukacji*)¹⁹, the Europass CV and Language Passport (the Polish version for pupils was developed in 2004 and for adults in 2005) have been increasing in use. In 2014, 36% more individuals completed them than in 2013²⁰.

It is worth mentioning that in 2011–2012, the Centre for Education Development (*Ośrodek Rozwoju Edukacji*) conducted a project promoting the use of the Language Passport in schools at every educational stage²¹.

Europass Mobility is issued via the Foundation for the Development of the Education System's online tool (the interested organisation fills in an e-form). After being confirmed by the Foundation, it is sent to the learner. In addition, coordinators of projects financed from sources other than Erasmus+ (e.g. ESF) can ask the Foundation to issue Europass Mobility documents to their participants (Cedefop, 2016b). In 2014, over 15,000 persons received this document, which was almost a 40% increase from 2013²².

The Europass Certificate Supplement (issued in Polish and/or English) is used as an information tool for future employers and education providers in Poland and abroad, providing greater understanding of the learning outcomes

19 The Foundation for the Development of the Education System manages the National Europass Centre. It is also the Polish National Agency of the Erasmus+ Programme. More information can be found on the website <http://www.frse.org.pl/>.

20 <http://www.frse.org.pl/program/europass/#1447239702206-c4a99944-8e6a> [23.11.2017]

21 Selected teachers were using this tool in their work with 4123 students in 12 (out of 16) regions for one to four semesters. Conclusions showed that this tool can be effectively used in teaching and results in an increased motivation of students to learn. However, before it could be implemented on a larger scale, more teachers need to be trained in its use (Pamuła-Barens and Sikora-Banasik, 2013).

22 <http://www.frse.org.pl/program/europass/#1447239702206-c4a99944-8e6a> [23.11.2017].

attained at the end of a learning process. There are three types of Europass Supplements which are issued in VET in Poland:

- Europass Certificate Supplement for VET diplomas awarded within formal (school-based) VET systems – they are issued by Regional Examination Boards,
- Europass Certificate Supplement to a journeyman certificate issued by the relevant craft chamber,
- Europass Certificate Supplement to a master craftsman diploma issued by the relevant craft chamber.

For the last two types of certificates, craft chambers must use the aforementioned online tool offered by the Foundation for the Development of the Education System (Cedefop, 2016b).

Diploma Supplements cover all information on what the graduate has learned (including learning outcomes, ECTS and grades). They have been provided since 2005 with every diploma issued by higher educational institutions (Urbanik, Misiewicz and Rasiński, 2011).

Youthpass

Youthpass is a tool for identifying and documenting learning outcomes acquired by youths outside of school. It has been used in Poland since 2007²³.

6.2. Validation arrangements and credit systems

6.2.1. Accumulation and transfer of learning outcomes within the IQS

The IQS enables credits to be accumulated and recognised in the course of awarding a given market qualification. These credits are understood as:

...distinguished sets of learning outcomes whose attainment has been confirmed through validation, and are part of the requirements for a given market qualification (IQS Act, art. 48, § 2).

Moreover, according to the IQS Act:

- sets of learning outcomes required for a given market qualification, acquired at different places and times, can be accumulated in stages and are the basis for awarding a qualification in the course of certification,
- sets of learning outcomes may be validated at different times and places,

23 During the “Youth in Action” programme, the number of issued Youthpass certificates increased annually, reaching 6538 by the end of 2012, for a total 17299 issued certificates (Taru and Kloosterman, 2013).

- the awarding body may recognise sets of learning outcomes other than those belonging to a market qualification (i.e. ECTS) as equivalents – these credits are not subject to re-assessment.

However, it is up to the awarding body to decide whether or not to recognise the sets of learning outcomes from an already awarded qualification included in the IQS as equivalent to the credits forming part of the requirements for a given market qualification. The decision is taken on the basis of the document confirming that the learning outcomes have been awarded – in most cases this would be a certificate or diploma.

Additionally, it is possible to have sets of learning outcomes recognised other than those from an already awarded qualification included in the IQS. In this case, the decision is based on an interview with the person undergoing validation and on an assessment of the documentation presented by that person.

6.2.2. Synergies between validation arrangements and ECTS and ECVET

ECTS

In the declaration inaugurating the Bologna Process in 1999, the validation of learning outcomes attained outside formal education was referenced indirectly through the system of credit accumulation and transfer (ECTS). The document emphasises that such credits may be acquired as the result of learning outside the higher education system, to the extent that ECTS points are recognised by the higher education institutions accepting the students (European Ministers of Education, 1999).

As stated previously in section 2.2., in 2014, higher education institutions were given the option to recognise learning outcomes attained outside the higher education system. Adults with appropriate professional experience – two, three or five years, depending on the cycle of study they want to attend – are able to commence a study programme and be granted ECTS points (though not more than 50% of all credits available) on the basis of having previously attained relevant learning outcomes. This shortens their period of study.

ECVET

While the ECVET system – including ECVET points – is not implemented by Polish law, its principles are embedded in the IQS and vocational education. It could be stated that although there is no ECVET system in Poland, there is an ECVET framework (Dębowski and Stęchły, 2015).

In the case of the IQS, arrangements concerning the accumulation and transfer of sets of learning outcomes support the idea of flexible pathways in lifelong learning. This is facilitated by the fact that each set of learning outcomes has an assigned PQF level, a title, and a specified workload needed to achieve it. It is also possible to define the requirements for the validation of each set. Additionally, market qualifications to be included in the IQS must be described using a common standard, as noted in section 2.4. Such qualifications usually have a smaller workload than diplomas and certificates in formal education.

In the case of formal vocational education, learning outcomes are grouped in sets, which typically contain several learning outcomes and reflect specific professional tasks. Occupations learned in schools in the course of VET are usually comprised of more than one qualification.

Additionally, ECVET principles are used in long-term mobility periods in higher education.

The only situation using ECVET points in Poland is in various educational mobility projects, most of them based on an agreement between the receiving and sending institutions and financed through the Erasmus+ Programme (Cedefop, 2016b). According to data provided by the Foundation for the Development of the Education System, the number of implemented IVET mobility projects using ECVET has increased in the last four years (from 33.1% in 2014 to 46.5% in 2017). However, even if a project does not explicitly mention ECVET, most of them use learning outcomes, sets of learning outcomes or Memoranda of Understanding and Learning Agreements (Cedefop, 2016b).

6.3. Open educational resources

There is lack of comprehensive data about the use of open educational resources among Polish students. This topic, which includes Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), was briefly raised in a document entitled Higher Education Development Programme by 2020 (*Program rozwoju szkolnictwa wyższego do 2020 roku*, 2017). A section of this document explains the phenomenon and notes that Poland is a “blank spot” when it comes to the development of MOOCs in Europe (Duda, 2016).

However, in 2018, the Ministry of Science and Higher Education commissioned the development of the first MOOC platform – Navoica (<https://navoica.pl/>). It currently offers four such courses. It is planned that the National Centre for Research and Development will announce a call for higher education institutions to prepare more high quality online courses. In terms of the validation arrangements for market qualifications within the IQS, an awarding body may recognise learning outcomes acquired through open educational resources and mobility experiences while designing its validation process, but there are no systemic solutions established in relation to these forms of learning.

7. Strengthening validation arrangements as a long term strategy in Poland

In Poland, several national strategies define lifelong learning, adult education and the validation of non-formal and informal learning as key ingredients for sustainable socio-economic development. The most recent one, *Strategy for Responsible Development 2020 – horizon 2030 (Strategia na rzecz Odpowiedzialnego Rozwoju do roku 2020 – z perspektywą do 2030 r., 2017)* builds on previous strategies such as:

- **The Lifelong Learning Perspective** (*Perspektywa Uczenia Się Przez Całe Życie, 2013*). This document restates the government's commitment to play an active role in the EU's lifelong learning policy. It highlights the paradigm shift in the education sector: from teaching knowledge to learning competences. Indeed, in the past, the Polish education system did not sufficiently foster the development of transversal competences, which was reflected in the relatively low ability of students to creatively solve practical problems that require applying knowledge and skills to a new situation. Furthermore, in order to adapt to globalization and the digital era, the education and training system should be built around learning outcomes and the effective validation of these outcomes, should facilitate mobility, guarantee transparency, promote global citizenship and adapt to changes on the labour market. Another operational objective included in the strategy is to build a coherent qualifications system as a key project in enabling these changes, including a system of the validation of non-formal and informal learning, especially of the learning that occurs in the workplace.
- **Human Capital Development Strategy 2020** (*Strategia Rozwoju Kapitału Ludzkiego 2020, issued in 2013*). This document is a development plan and a detailed version of key strategies defined in the *National Development Strategy 2020 (Strategia Rozwoju Kraju 2020, issued in 2012)*. Specific objective 5 particularly targets the development of a national qualifications system and a system of validating non-formal and informal learning in the contexts of raising the level of qualifications and skills of individuals.
- **Social Capital Development Strategy** (*Strategia Rozwoju Kapitału Społecznego, 2013*) also complements the main National Development Strategy 2020. The focus of the document is non-formal learning, which takes place in different places and throughout life and is becoming increasingly important in acquiring skills and qualifications. Strategies and activities undertaken in this area consist of supporting broadly understood social education and global citizenship, effectively using available public spaces and the potential inherent in people and institutions.

The **Strategy for Responsible Development 2020** mentioned above, takes a more holistic approach, encompassing in one document all aspects of economic, social and spatial development, with special attention paid to the production of knowledge and innovative technologies in Poland. The promotion of lifelong learning as well as creating widespread access to the validation of non-formal and informal learning is presented as an important, long term action in the horizon of 2030. Furthermore, the implementation of the IQS as a strategic project is shown as playing an important role in sustainable development and human capital development, especially in raising the number of active learners in Poland and strengthening the effectiveness of investments in human capital.

Additionally, the Educational Research Institute was tasked by the Minister of National Education with preparing the **Integrated Skills Strategy** (*Zintegrowana Strategia Umiejętności*) for OECD, a document with a narrower scope, focused on diagnosing different factors affecting the skills level of Polish society and creating a sustainable model for raising this level, taking into account the needs linked to the changing global economy. This opens new possibilities for setting goals regarding further developments in lifelong learning policy and complementary mechanisms, such as the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

A general paradigm shift in the field of education, including formal education, has already taken place in Poland, creating new opportunities – especially for adults – for gaining qualifications. The introduction of the IQS Act was another step forward in creating a cohesive scheme for the development and awarding of all qualifications, including those developed by and for the labour market. This is an opportunity to implement further validation mechanisms for non-formal and informal learning in accordance with the 2012 Council recommendation.

The IQS is still a relatively young system that is already being optimised and will surely see more development in the future. One of the aspects requiring extra attention is the promotion of validation as a process that includes the identification and documentation of learning outcomes as well as assessment, accompanied by specialised guidance that could supplement other forms of support already available to individuals. This is strongly linked to building social trust in less conventional validation methods, such as the portfolio method. Another challenge that needs to be addressed is to identify the synergy between the vocational guidance offered by schools or public employment services and the IQS. This is especially important for the various forms of skills audits to be useful for individuals, regardless of where they were performed, the individual's situation on the labour market and the educational and career path he/she wants and needs to take in the future. Different solutions will be analysed, focusing on the central role of the individual and the continuous, lifelong and life-wide learning essential in inspiring innovation, economic growth as well as global citizenship.

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