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Introduction

Developing the qualifications system in Poland requires ongoing cooperation with social partners. For this reason, the Educational Research Institute, which is implementing a systemic project entitled “The development of terms of reference for the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework and the National Qualifications Register for lifelong learning”¹ invited representatives of various stakeholder groups of the future qualifications system to a debate on the Polish Qualifications Framework (PQF) in February of 2011. The organisers of the debate did not want the PQF, as an integral part of the national qualifications system being developed in Poland, to only be the result of the work of experts, but wanted to confront it with the expectations of practitioners.

This report presents the specific objectives of the debate, its course, topics of specific meetings, reports of the discussions, and the effects of the joint work. We also describe the conclusions of the debate and the resulting changes introduced to the expert project of the Polish Qualifications Framework.

The first stage of the public debate lasted from February to June 2011. At these meetings, in addition to discussing the draft PQF, an overview was conducted of existing solutions in Poland in the field of awarding qualifications (elements of the future national qualifications system), with the following issues considered:

- the first group discussed the Polish Qualifications Framework project,
- the second group discussed whether and how the future qualifications system and PQF could help reduce barriers to lifelong learning,
- the third group discussed the system of validating learning outcomes and quality assurance mechanisms for qualifications.

Each thematic group met five times. During the groups’ work, debate participants exchanged opinions, expressed reservations about the structural elements of the frameworks under development and suggested new ideas. They also pointed attention to various problems in the Polish labour market, in education and shared their experiences related to the topics under discussion.

The second stage of the debate began with a conference held on November 21, 2011. Project experts presented the state of work and report from the first stage of the debate. Participants received the first edition of “A Glossary of Key Concepts related to the National Qualifications System” (Sławiński, 2011).

Another series of debate meetings was planned in three thematic groups:

- the Polish Qualifications Framework and PQF level descriptors characteristic for the given type of education and sectoral qualifications frameworks,
- the principles of assigning qualifications to PQF levels,
- the principles of the national qualifications system and the national qualifications register, including the principles of involving stakeholders, validation and quality assurance.

As work progressed, the problems dealt with in the groups were more precisely defined. As a result, the first group discussed level descriptors typical for vocational education, while the second group addressed the issue of the principles of introducing qualifications into the Integrated Qualifications Register and determining their level.

During the second stage of the debate, summarised at a conference in Warsaw on September 24, 2013, a total of eight thematic group meetings were held, as well as four joint meetings of all debate participants to discuss qualifications.

¹ Human Capital Operational Programme, Priority III, Measure 3.4, Sub-measure 3.4.1.

The debate was attended by representatives of:

- ministries,
- labour offices,
- employers' organisations (including sectoral representatives) and trade unions,
- public institutions carrying out educational tasks,
- training companies,
- national institutions involved in the education system,
- associations and non-governmental organisations,
- research and consulting institutions.

About 200 persons representing 101 institutions participated in the meetings.

This report uses the terminology presented in the referencing report to describe the solutions developed for the national qualifications system.

Part 1. Discussion about the Polish Qualifications Framework project

Meetings of this thematic group were led by Dr. Agnieszka Chłoń-Domińczak. The group expert was Dr. Stanisław Sławiński. Dr. Zbigniew Czwartosz facilitated the discussion.

During the first two meetings, discussions focused on general issues regarding the terminology used and linguistic inconsistencies found in descriptions of specific elements of the new qualifications system, as well as on matters related to the structure of the PQF. Experiences from the process of developing banking sector qualifications were presented.

The next three meetings were devoted to presenting how the qualifications are described by using level descriptors and discussions about specific component parts of the descriptors developed in the experts' proposal of the PQF.

1.1. Information about the Polish Qualifications Framework presented to participants

The national qualifications system (NQS) is the entirety of activities carried out in a country related to validating learning outcomes for the needs of the labour market, civil society and the personal development of learners, based on a national qualifications framework. It especially includes the process of awarding and recognising qualifications, as well as the quality assurance of qualifications.² The NQS aims to increase the ability to consider and formally document new competences acquired in very different ways throughout life. The key element of this system is the Polish Qualifications Framework, which will serve as the common frame of reference for all qualifications.

Developing a modern NQS, which not only will enable Polish society to take on new civilizational challenges, but also will be appropriately linked to qualifications systems in other European countries, requires that suitable terminology be established. It must be free of ambiguity, but the terms will be defined differently than the way they are commonly used to describe qualifications or in the traditionally used Polish nomenclature of the field.

The key element of the qualifications system will be the Polish Qualifications Framework. The PQF will describe the mutual relations between qualifications and integrate the various qualifications subsystems in the country. The PQF will also describe the hierarchy of qualifications levels.

Eight levels of qualifications are distinguished in the Polish Qualifications Framework (PQF). Learning outcomes that must be achieved are described for each level. These descriptions, known as descriptors, define the full spectrum of learning outcomes regardless of whether they were achieved in school, an institution of higher education, or at later stages (for example, while working after having completed education in school or an institution of higher education). The PQF takes into consideration learning outcomes achieved through the formal and non-formal education systems, as well as resulting from informal learning.

As in the EQF, the PQF categorises learning outcomes into three groups:

- knowledge – a set of substantiated judgments (a body of facts, theories and principles of conduct) resulting from the cognitive activity of a person. In the context of the European Qualifications Framework, knowledge is described as theoretical and/or factual;
- skills – the ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems. In the context of the EQF, skills are described as cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments); and

² Definition proposed in "A Glossary of Key Concepts related to the National Qualifications System".

- social competence – the proven ability (in work, study situations and personal development) to use knowledge and skills within the context of an internalised system of values. The EQF describes social competence in terms of responsibility and autonomy.

Descriptors of each successive PQF level differ from those of the preceding (lower) levels. These differences are significant and relate to the amount and depth of knowledge, degree of complexity/difficulty of required skills and the level of independence and ability to assume responsibility for work, activities or study (one's own and at higher levels, also that of other persons).

In accordance with the approved concept of qualifications frameworks in Europe, level descriptors in the Polish Qualifications Framework have varying degrees of specificity. The universal descriptors in the European Qualifications Framework serve as the reference for the structure of the Polish Qualifications Framework. This enables the proposed Polish qualification levels to be clearly referenced to the eight levels distinguished in the EQF.

Using the PQF to systematise qualifications enables greater transparency, availability and quality of the qualifications to be achieved. Learners will be able to acquire qualifications through various paths, including participation in formal and non-formal education, as well as informal learning.

An initial, expert proposal of the Polish Qualifications Framework was prepared by a team of experts from the project "Establishing a balance sheet of qualifications and competences available in Poland's labour market and developing a model of the National Qualifications Framework". This was the first stage of work on the Polish Qualifications Framework, completed in January 2010. It proposed distinguishing seven qualifications levels in Poland. In August 2010, the Steering Committee for the National Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning, whose members include representatives of appropriate ministries, decided to increase the framework to eight levels.

1.2. About problems with terminology

After familiarising themselves with the proposals in the model of the Polish Qualifications Framework, debate participants discussed the terminology used for the qualifications system. The need to use uniform terminology for various types of initiatives related to establishing the qualifications system and its elements was emphasised. Participants also raised the need to reconcile the terminology used in the Polish Qualifications Framework with the language used for already existing descriptions of occupations, qualifications and professional requirements. Participants recommended greater use of the language employed by recruitment services (HR, personnel, etc.) and employers. It was emphasised that the language used in official documents, often as a result of poor translations, is incomprehensible and hermetic. Debate participants concluded that there needs to be separate, solid and joint work conducted on the definitions and terminology used in the qualifications system. Many participants declared an interest in working on the development of a coherent and clear terminology.

In response to the issues raised during discussions, Dr. Stanisław Sławiński informed participants about work underway in the project on a glossary of terms related to the qualifications system. This glossary will unify the terminology used in projects and informational materials about the PQF, as well as in broader discussions about establishing a new qualifications system in Poland. The glossary will include an expanded description of the most important terms, specifying the definition of the term, the context of the definition, references to legal acts and European documents, examples of use and relationships to other terms. An initial list of terms proposed for the glossary was also presented.

During the discussion, participants talked about the list of proposed terms. They suggested expanding the glossary with several concepts related to education: for example, lifelong learning, competences (including knowledge, skills). They pointed to the need to search for uniform words, to look for one term for the process of learning and to leave out terms related to organising this process (coaching, for example).

In summarising the theme of this discussion, participants agreed that the presented scope of terms exceeded their expectations. The choice of terms should take into consideration the utilitarian objectives of the glossary and include those terms essential to establishing the qualifications system. During the meeting in May 2011, participants were informed of the status of work on the glossary project. Dr. Stanisław Sławiński, editor of the glossary, presented the premises of the publication and, among others, the framework for describing the terms.

1.3. About the expert project of the Polish Qualifications Framework

The debate on the PQF project was divided into two parts. The first part concerned the general structure of the Polish Qualifications Framework and the accepted manner of describing its levels. The second part of the discussion focused on specific proposals of describing the descriptors at all levels of the PQF.

Dr. Sławiński introduced the discussion about the structure of descriptors with his presentation "A new system of defining qualifications through the use of level descriptors". He provided basic information about the proposals prepared by the experts.

The descriptors defining the levels of the European Qualifications Framework serve as the external (meta-generic) point of reference for the Polish Qualifications Framework descriptors. Despite the fact that all the descriptors in the PQF are a general description of learning outcomes, they differ by the level of specificity and the area to which they refer.

Three categories of descriptors are distinguished in the PQF, whose general descriptions comprise the features of each PQF level.

The most general are universal descriptors (first stage generic descriptors), which are common for all learning paths (general, higher and vocational education).

Second stage generic descriptors distinguish the differences in the areas of education: general, vocational and higher. These include:

- learning outcome descriptors for general education. These descriptors may be applied to other sectors, but they are not universal. They describe the learning outcomes for levels 1–4;
- learning outcome descriptors for vocational education. These descriptors may be applied to other sectors, but they are not universal. They describe the learning outcomes for levels 1–8; and
- learning outcome descriptors for higher education. These descriptors may be applied to other sectors, but they are not universal. They describe the learning outcomes for levels 5–8.

Examples of even more detailed descriptors are those developed for higher education, training and for sectoral qualifications frameworks (already being developed for some fields). In general education, more specific descriptors will most likely consist of specific learning outcomes for the core curricula of elementary school, lower and upper secondary schools.

The division of PQF descriptors into universal ones and those appropriate to general, higher and vocational education generated many reservations among debate participants. Comments were raised about the role of the universal descriptors in the context of the more detailed descriptors proposed for these particular areas of education.

A number of doubts were especially raised by the division of the descriptors into three separate groups (for general, higher and vocational education). Participants feared that this will excessively separate these areas, limiting opportunities for their development and integration within one qualifications framework system in Poland. Participants also feared that this might result in greater inconsistency in the requirements to achieve the same level of qualifications through the different educational sectors – general, higher and vocational.

Opinions were raised that this division could be modified in the future and significantly simplified. Dr. Stanisław Sławiński explained that the division of descriptors is based on the actual organisational division of the Polish educational system, with this being the result of historical factors. Additionally, the requirements of vocational knowledge are somewhat different than those for general

education and this specificity should be respected. He also pointed out that the intent of the experts preparing the proposed PQF was to reflect the realities of the existing educational system in Poland, while at the same time indicating the direction of change so that in the future, qualifications would reflect learning outcomes achieved through various paths. He emphasised the significance of maintaining a balance in the descriptions of requirements for the levels in the entire Polish Qualifications Framework.

Also discussed were: the manner of describing competences at each level, the role of universal descriptors, and finally, developing the content for successive framework levels adapted to specific occupations. A question was raised, for example, on the origin of the proposed detailed descriptors. The participants postulated that the PQF descriptors be as transparent as possible. It should clearly follow from their descriptions that a person going on to a higher level must previously achieve all the competences of the lower level. A proposal was made to divide descriptors not by the factual state of education, but according to the expected model aimed for, which will ensure greater flexibility of the system and facilitate transfers between general and vocational education.

Participants also expressed doubt about the consistency of first having universal descriptors, then specifying their requirements in a division of the three educational areas, and afterwards detailing them at the level of sectors. They also pointed out the need to connect the core curricula of general education with the PQF. Some expressed the opinion that a significant added value of the universal descriptors is lacking in relation to the descriptors of the European Qualifications Framework. Dr. Agnieszka Chłoń-Domińczak explained that the European descriptors are not part of the Polish Qualifications Framework, which will be independent. Their inclusion into the description at this stage serves solely as a reference point due to the necessity of preparing the referencing report.

In reference to vocational education, the introductory presentation showed how the requirements could be specified going from the Polish Qualifications Framework, which includes the general requirements for each level, to the sectoral qualifications frameworks. Participants expressed doubt as to whether it will be possible to create sectoral frameworks for many of the trades during the term of the project. These proposals, according to the participants, should also be the subject of consultations with representatives of the trades.

Dr. Agnieszka Chłoń-Domińczak explained that initial designs of several sectoral frameworks will be prepared as part of the project to provide examples of how to move from the general to more specific descriptions, taking into consideration the specificity of the selected occupations. Sectoral frameworks will not be an obligatory element of the qualifications system, but they may be helpful in developing descriptions of qualifications in the vocational sector. These proposals should emerge in about 1½ years. The involvement is planned of representatives and experts from specific occupations to prepare the descriptors for the sectoral frameworks.

During discussions on the structure of the PQF, the issue was raised of the place and role of vocational education and its various forms, including also vocational higher education schools, in the qualifications system. This issue was not discussed in detail during the debate, however participants signalled the problem, related as well to assigning qualifications achieved through vocational education to specific levels. A representative of the Polish Craft Association noted the need to refer to the Copenhagen Process while working on the qualifications system design, and to also include existing and already applied solutions, for example, in verifying the quality of vocational education. Another issue raised was ensuring appropriate interactions between general and vocational education, as well as in defining the relationship between the classification of occupations and specialisations. Participants emphasised that the PQF should relate to the economic situation to the greatest extent possible. They stated that the PQF should be appropriately linked to legal regulations, especially the School Education Act and its planned amendments.

In response, Dr. Sławiński noted that the intent of the project's authors was to ground the PQF within the context of the actual processes occurring in Poland in the various areas of education. In referring to the postulated simplification of the text to facilitate understanding of the development of the qualifications framework, he stated that an essential function of the PQF is to enable

qualifications to be assigned to levels, as well as to define the qualifications. The PQF model can thus be treated as an internal instrument in the qualifications system, and as such could be made more complicated. As with users of televisions or computers, the ordinary user of the qualifications system will not be “looking inside” this tool – to be known as the PQF – they will rather be looking for information needed on attaining qualifications in Poland. It should also be remembered that the PQF does not refer to cycles of education, but that it is a referencing framework for various types of qualifications that are also acquired outside of the school system.

1.4. About the Polish Qualifications Framework descriptors

The discussion about the descriptors for specific levels took place within the context of some basic questions related to this issue:

- Is coherence maintained between “horizontal” and “vertical” descriptors?
- Are the entries suitably entered into the columns (in other words, should the given requirement be required of, for example, a competence or a skill)?
- Is the terminology appropriate and are linguistic norms maintained?
- Is the proposed description complete?

Meetings on this issue began with work on the PQF design and an analysis of PQF entries level by level. Formulations that raised doubts and suggested modifications were noted in draft versions of the framework. These were used in work on formulating the final entries of the Polish Qualifications Framework project.

During discussions about the descriptor entries, participants again emphasised the importance of wording the entries as simply as possible and using uncomplicated words. It is also important to avoid nuances, as well as unnecessary wording (including adjectives) which do not add to the substantive content. International experiences can be used during the work on the entries, including those of countries outside of the European Union (an interesting inspiration may be, for example, the qualifications frameworks of Russia).

Participants stated that ensuring consistency in the terminology used is essential. Also, the requirements at specific levels must be defined in such a way so that a person in the process of attaining a given qualification understands the differences between levels and their increasing expectations. It was proposed that a table be built showing the gradation of requirements related to selected competences through successive PQF levels.

The next significant issue raised in the debate was maintaining consistency between the PQF and the EQF so that the requirements defined at a specific PQF level were not greater than the equivalent EQF level. Too rigorous requirements in the PQF may make the mobility of Polish workers in European markets more difficult. Debate participants also proposed that entries’ transparency and consistency be ensured in the links between descriptions of competences (social and personal) found in the PQF and EQF.

Attention was also turned to the inconsistencies found in the proposed PQF among the descriptor entries for vocational education. The debate participants believed that the requirements defined by the descriptors for vocational education were in some cases higher than for general and higher education descriptors (for example, the requirements for directing a team and leadership at level 5). Additionally, entries from specific columns (knowledge, skills and social and personal competence) were inappropriately categorised. Debate participants emphasised that in the case of vocational education descriptors, terminology found in the labour market should be used, e.g. the terms used to develop employee competency models.

Participants also commented on specific entries and proposed the following:

- to give thought to the level at which entries related to ethics should be introduced,
- to consider adding requirements related to entrepreneurship (especially in the case of vocational education),

- to add requirements on knowledge of a foreign language to descriptors for higher education,
- to consider adding descriptors related to innovativeness at level 6,
- to consider adding such elements as: managing processes, planning, management, creating new products and services, responsibility for the development of other persons at levels 7 and 8 in the PQF.

Based on the first discussion, corrections were made to the universal descriptors. As a result of the debate, as well as consultations held with the academic community, corrections were additionally developed to proposed descriptors for higher education (levels 6–8). These proposals were also discussed during the debate.

Debate participants also deliberated on the amended proposals of entries for higher education descriptors at levels 6, 7 and 8. The amended proposal of universal descriptors included over 20 corrections that resulted from earlier discussions. Debate participants positively reacted to most of the proposed changes during the discussion. They also provided a number of additional proposals and opinions for better organisation, among others, related to the adequacy of the required competences to the assigned level. The need to maintain an appropriate gradient of requirements at specific levels continued to be emphasised. Participants also pointed out the need to appropriately word requirements at the higher levels of the qualifications about working in teams, as well as strategic management, assuming responsibility for the development of teams or subordinates, and developing lifelong learning attitudes.

The proposal presented did not take into account level 5 because the group of experts developing the descriptors based their work on the tri-level Bologna descriptors for the European Higher Education Area, which does not include a fifth level. A group of specialists representing various fields is working on level 5 descriptors as part of the NQF project.

Based on the documents presented, participants pointed out that the differences increased between the way learning outcomes are formulated and presented for general, vocational and higher education. The meeting's chairperson, Dr. Agnieszka Chłóń-Domińczak, explained that these differences result from changes introduced as a result of discussions held during the debate. Because of various stages of advancement in the work on modifying the descriptors, such differences may be visible. However, they should be reduced as the missing elements are developed.

During one of the meetings, a new way of defining descriptors for vocational education was proposed that incorporated the discussion and opinions of debate participants. Invited experts, Dr. Krystyna Lelińska and Maciej Gruza, presented the proposals. They proposed that competences defined at specific levels be grouped by different types of tasks.

During the discussion, participants acknowledged the great amount of work required to develop this new way of describing vocational education descriptors. The experts' proposals presented the concept of dividing the descriptors into four categories. This division systematised the descriptors at specific levels in the PQF and also better reflected the gradient of required competences from one level to the next. Participants suggested that in the final version of the PQF, these categories should accumulate within the framework of specific levels; in other words, if someone must fulfil a criterion from a lower level, then s/he also must possess it at a higher level.

Meeting participants pointed attention to the fact that developing the descriptors presented only on the basis of the Classification of Occupations and Specialisations could narrow the described field. They proposed that the Polish Classification of Activity (PCA) also be taken into account. Attention should also be paid to the terminology used in the descriptions, which is not consistent with the language used in the universal descriptors (for example, theoretical and practical knowledge). Participants also proposed highlighting elements in the descriptor definitions that are part of the work process, such as planning, organising, implementing and verifying.

The need to enforce the principles accepted during the process of developing the framework model was emphasised, as the higher level includes the lower level. In other words, someone who has a qualification at level four must have the sum of knowledge, skills and competence from levels 1–4.

Meeting participants also noted the need to analyse the distribution of requirements in specific columns – knowledge, skills and social competence.

In response to participants' comments, Maciej Gruza explained that the PCA was deliberately not considered in the process of developing the descriptors, as this would introduce a division by sectors. They intentionally resigned from describing the process of work in the classical manner because it contained too many elements of a technical nature. The formula presented is based on psychological and sociological theory, which facilitates the development of descriptors with tools analysing the intensity of the defined features.

Participants pointed out that in the case of some of the qualifications, one of the four categories could become dominant, with the others less significant. The category that will dominate depends on the type of qualification and its related occupation. This issue should be resolved during the process of developing the principles of assigning qualifications to levels. It was also noted that using the wording in the *competence* column "Is able to..." refers more to a description of skills, and not competences.

Dr. Stanisław Sławiński stated that often qualifications found at the highest level do not have an equivalent at lower levels. In highly qualified occupations, competences can develop in two different directions: either in the direction of skills required to manage ever larger structures in a given occupation, or "deeper" in the direction of greater specialisation. This needs to be considered in the descriptions of requirements.

The proposed descriptors presented for vocational education are a starting point from which their final version will be developed. The presentation during the debate was aimed at depicting the approach used in developing the qualifications framework for vocational education. The next stage of work will be to develop more generic (general) descriptions based on these entries.

A proposal for the sectoral qualifications framework for financial institutions was also presented during the debate by a representative of the Warsaw Institute of Banking (WIB). WIB is a partner in the FIRST project implemented through the Leonardo da Vinci Programme, whose aim was to develop the European Qualifications Framework for the financial services sector (sectoral frameworks). In our country, sectoral frameworks will use third stage generic descriptors.

1.5. Summary of the group discussions

Participants already pointed out several significant issues requiring discussion and analysis in the course of the meeting that began the debate. During the meetings of the first thematic group, issues related to the terminology used in the debate and to developing the qualifications system were discussed, as was the proposed Polish Qualifications Framework consisting of both the table with the universal descriptors, as well as those for general, higher and vocational education.

Moreover, the participants asked about implementation of the qualifications system connected to the Polish Qualifications Framework. Among others, the following questions were raised:

- Who will describe the qualifications and occupations in accordance with the PQF?
- Is it necessary to redefine those qualifications and occupations that are already described?
- Will there be enough time to define full and partial qualifications before legal regulations are enacted that enable information about the PQF level to be included?

During the debate, participants declared their willingness to work together within their fields on activities related to describing qualifications, including the qualifications in those professions with which they are affiliated.

In terms of the attainment of qualifications by learners, it was pointed out that accumulating qualifications should not only be related to achieving full qualifications at successive levels, but also to broadening the resources of a possessed qualification within a level.

Debaters agreed that work on the qualifications system and the Polish Qualifications Framework is not the fulfilment of a European Union bureaucratic requirement, but a significant process for

education and the labour market that verifies the quality of education and expectations of employers. As such, it requires a very solid approach and the development of a shared vision of this new system by many stakeholders.

Participants emphasised that the needs of learners should be most important in developing the qualifications system, which also means that the Polish Qualifications Framework must be kept simple. In the opinion of those participating in the discussions, the PQF is a tool of the future for Polish education, because it will be evolving in the direction indicated by the requirements described in the framework. According to the debaters, implementing the qualifications system, of which the PQF is an element, provides the opportunity to reduce deception and fiction in awarding qualifications. The result of the first group's work was mutual agreement about the need for a qualifications system glossary. Participants accepted the concept of the glossary and the most important terms of this system.³

After explanations and discussions, debate participants in this group acknowledged the proposed structure of the Polish Qualifications Framework, with the provision that consistency must be maintained in the entries relating to each level and each included educational area. During the discussion on the proposed PQF, corrections to the proposed universal descriptors were developed and discussed. The new approach to formulating descriptors for vocational education was also accepted. A number of valuable proposals were made to correct the proposed descriptors for higher education (proposed changes are also the results of consultations conducted in the academic community). An assessment of the descriptors related to the level of their detail was made. The practical experiences of the various involved communities allowed the proposed PQF to be confronted with the effects of formal education and informal learning related to the work environment.

³ The glossary was prepared and presented for approval to the Steering Committee for the National Qualifications Framework and the Inter-ministerial Team for Lifelong Learning, including the National Qualifications Framework.

Part 2. The potential impact of developing the qualifications system, including the Polish Qualifications Framework, on reducing barriers to lifelong learning

Meetings of the second thematic group were led by Horacy Dębowski and Henryk Michałowicz of the Educational Research Institute. Discussions were facilitated by Dr. Agata Gójska and Paweł Luft. All of the opinions and conclusions presented in this part of the report were formulated by the participants; no change in the content was made by the discussion leaders. The task of the leaders was to initiate discussion, set the schedule and clarify the goals of the meetings, create favourable conditions for discussions and group work, oversee the agenda and document – systematise and classify – the formulated conclusions. The discussion was divided into two parts:

- the development of a catalogue of barriers to learning; and
- the creation of a package of proposed activities to reduce the recognised barriers and indicate which activities can be implemented as a result of introducing the national qualifications system based on the PQF. This topic was discussed in four working sub-groups. The effects of the discussions of each sub-group were later presented and discussed in a meeting of the entire group.

The discussions enabled a comprehensive review to be made of the barriers existing in Poland making lifelong learning difficult. Various activities were also discussed that, according to the participants, could lead to the creation of more favourable conditions for lifelong learning. Many persons expressed the hope that the Polish Qualifications Framework now being prepared will increase the effectiveness of various activities directed towards the development of lifelong learning. Group members declared their readiness to work further on establishing a modern qualifications system in Poland.

2.1. Information on lifelong learning presented to participants

For years, Poland has experienced one of the lowest rates of participation in lifelong learning in Europe.⁴ Few persons after age 25 decide to supplement their qualifications or acquire new ones. The low educational activity of adults in recent years has not even been changed by the several-fold increase in resources devoted to adult education, attained in large part thanks to financing from the European Social Fund.⁵

The literature emphasises the need to change attitudes about the learning process and acquiring competences, not only among learners but also among employers, as well as educational (institutions of higher education, schools) and training institutions (e.g. training firms).⁶ In the documents of international⁷ and national institutions (e.g. the document “Perspectives for lifelong learning”) attention is given, moreover, to the significant impact of the qualifications system in a given country, not only on the way the above-mentioned entities act, but also on the motivations for improving

⁴ See e.g. H. Dębowski, M. Lis, K. Pogorzelski, *Kształcenie ustawiczne w czasie zmian in: Zatrudnienie w Polsce 2008. Praca w cyklu życia*, M. Bukowski, ed., Warszawa 2008; OECD, *Highlights from Education at glance 2010*, pp. 28–29; Eurostat, *Key figures on Europe*, 2011 edition, p. 67.

⁵ This information originates from a strategic project document entitled “Perspectives for lifelong learning” produced by the Inter-ministerial Team for Lifelong Learning, including the National Qualifications Framework.

⁶ OECD, *Qualifications systems – Bridges to lifelong learning*, Paris 2007; ILO, *The implementation and impact of National Qualifications Systems Frameworks, Report of a study in 16 countries*, Geneva 2009; *Developing Qualifications Frameworks in EU Partner Countries, Modernising Education and Training*, J.M. Castejon, B. Chakroun, M. Coles, A. Deij, V. McBride, eds., London 2011.

⁷ See, among others, the reports of OECD, International Labor Organization (ILO), CEDEFOP (*European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training*) and the European Commission.

or extending qualifications or investing in employee training. Many authors believe that national qualifications systems can promote the acquisition of additional competences or – which happens often – discourage such activities. This is why qualifications frameworks play such a significant role as one of a country's most important policy tools in establishing a modern qualifications system which completely supports the concept of lifelong learning.

For this very reason the Team for the NQF at the Educational Research Institute (IBE) acknowledged that the issue of the role of qualifications frameworks in lifelong learning policy should be a topic of discussion in this debate. The meeting schedule of the second thematic group was designed so that the discussions initiated on identifying barriers to lifelong learning and defining possible ways to reduce them also enabled the achievement of the following aims:

- to ascertain the opinions of various stakeholder representatives about the proposed strategies in the policy of lifelong learning in Poland (in relation to formal and non-formal education and informal learning);
- to identify which areas of lifelong learning policies could be served by the PQF as an effective "repair mechanism", and which areas require additional solutions or modifications of existing ones;
- to promote knowledge about the PQF; and
- to identify issues related to this problem that should be the subject of study conducted by the Educational Research Institute.

2.2. Types of barriers to lifelong learning

During the first two meetings, existing barriers to lifelong learning in Poland were discussed. They were classified to six categories:

- barriers related to the motivations of people,
- barriers related to the functioning of the educational and higher educational systems,⁸
- barriers related to the training market (that is, workshops, courses, etc. provided outside of the educational system and higher education),
- institutional and legal barriers,
- financial barriers,
- other factors influencing the decision not to pursue learning.

The discussion participants acknowledged that the chosen categories are not exclusive and serve more to organise the work, as many of them are interrelated.

2.3. Barriers related to the motivations of people

A number of barriers related to the motivations of people to pursue learning were indicated, among them internal barriers (directly related to the learner) and external barriers (resulting from social conditions).

Internal barriers include:

- The lack of skills in establishing educational goals and consistently implementing them:
 - Participants of this group believe that the skill of establishing goals is critical to professional and personal development. Setting out a goal, which one wants to achieve, as well as a path leading to that goal and keeping to it, are factors contributing to the success of an individual. According to the participants, such skills should be taught from the earliest years in school.
 - Lack of awareness of one's own needs, capabilities and limitations. For this reason, learners do not feel that they are learning for themselves. They don't realize that learning may be

⁸ During the public debate, the term "formal education" was used to mean "formal general, vocational and higher education".

Part 2. The potential impact of the qualifications system 2.3. Barriers related to the motivations of people

an answer to at least some of their needs. In such a situation, the willingness to learn does not come “from within the person”, and the necessity to learn becomes something that is forced upon them and therefore accepted either with ambivalence or unwillingly.

- Lack of an attitude promoting professional and personal development.
- Lack of faith in one’s own strengths – as a learner ages, s/he begins to doubt in the ability to absorb new knowledge and skills.
- Lack of awareness that learning can be a tool for improvement or even to maintain one’s position in the labour market.
- Low awareness of the need for training – workers often do not know that their skills have become outdated. On the other hand, employers are not always aware that their employees would like to be trained or that training could lead to improved work performance.
- Lack of certainty that the acquired competences will ensure improvement in one’s status in the labour market. Often attending training does not result in increased wages or improved chances of securing employment. In treating training as an investment, participants primarily ask about the reward. If the reward is not certain or deferred to some future time, the willingness to participate in training decreases.

External barriers:

- Poor modelling for learning is passed down in the home (inherited social status). Debate participants indicated that the parent is a child’s first educator – the parent motivates and forms attitudes about learning. If the parent does not perceive the benefits of learning and does not encourage it, the child lacks a positive model.
- Learning is not perceived as trendy – debate participants indicated that leisure time is treated in Poland (mainly) as a time to relax from any intellectual effort. The awareness that this time can be used to acquire new knowledge and skills is rarely encountered.
- An unfavourable stereotype exists that learning should occur only during youth. Older people have doubts whether it is still “suitable” for them to be educated. Persons in middle age who decide to pursue a higher degree feel unsure and foreign in the company of 20-year-olds (during the discussions, the term “social embarrassment” was used).
- An inadequate educational offer for the needs and predispositions of learners – teachers (trainers) often are convinced that “everyone can learn everything” without taking into account the personal preferences and intellectual capabilities of learners. This results in an ineffective use of time and weakens motivation to learn.
- Limited number of vocational counsellors – discussion participants believed that the number of advisers is far too few in relation to the needs. In addition, the system of using counsellors is ineffective, as they are only employed in public institutions – employment offices or schools. This means that persons who are either not students or clients of county employment offices have difficulty accessing this type of counselling service. During the meetings, the role of school career counsellors was extensively discussed. It was mentioned that the *Regulation of the minister of national education of 17 November 2010, on detailed rules for the operation of public psychological/pedagogical counselling centres, including the public specialised counselling centres* (Journal of Laws, No. 228, item 1488) is not being generally implemented because of the lack of financial resources at the local government level. There are 2,479 townships in Poland, whereas only 1,100 counsellors. For this reason, the essential assistance that such counsellors can provide is significantly limited to young people.
- Absence of a “mentor” in firms – participants perceive the disappearing tradition of taking younger employers “under the wing” by a more experienced person as one of the barriers to learning.

2.4. Barriers related to the functioning of the formal general, vocational and higher education systems

Participants pointed to the following issues:

- Negative experiences of attending school – participants strongly emphasised this issue. It was argued that if learning at school was neither pleasant nor promoted development, it acquires a negative connotation. Later in life, such adverse associations may result in a subconscious reluctance to enrich and broaden knowledge, skills and competence.
- Too much emphasis on assessment – pupils in Polish schools are motivated by assessments – they are not learning for themselves and their development. It is possible that a pupil who frequently receives poor assessments becomes convinced that in his/her case, further learning is pointless. Participants noted the example of the Waldorf schools, where the lack of grades favours the development of other motivations for learning.
- Schematic didactic approach (focus on recreating) – lecturing is the preferred mode of teaching classroom lessons without the active participation of the pupil. What is required of the pupil is not understanding but, above all, remembering the lesson. As a result, the pupil is dependent and not very resourceful. The pupil has encyclopaedic knowledge, but has problems using this knowledge in practice. In effect, the pupil is unable to broaden knowledge and learn new skills in the absence of a teacher. In later periods of life, this may translate into a permanent reluctance to further learning and significantly decrease its effectiveness.
- Lack of developing social competence, including the skills of cooperating – pupils of Polish schools are often shy and embarrassed, afraid to admit ignorance. They do not participate in a group forum and have difficulties working together with others.
- Insufficient competency of teachers – schools cannot cultivate the social competence of pupils if this is not sufficiently developed in teachers. Teachers are often not equipped with the skills for effective communication and teamwork. As debate participants indicated, this is the result, among other things, of a poor model of teacher training and the so-called negative selection for the profession.
- The low relevance of the curriculum in schools and higher education institutions from the perspective of career development – participants in the debate stated that graduates of schools and higher education institutions are often unprepared to meet the needs of the modern labour market. This is due, among others, to the low requirements of educational institutions and too little practice of what was learned – both in terms of the number of hours, as well as the proportion in the curriculum. According to the discussion participants, these deficiencies are partially due to an insufficient analysis of the needs of learners as future employees.

2.5. Barriers related to the training market

Participants in the discussion provided a significant amount of attention to an assessment of the training market and pointed out its many deficiencies:

- Low quality of the training offered – in the opinion of participants, too great an emphasis is placed on theory and not enough on developing practical skills.
- Topics of training programs are not designed for the needs of people who are socially excluded or at risk of becoming excluded – many unemployed persons and persons considered long-term unemployed participate in many training courses without experiencing an effect on their status in the labour market. The program of offered training does not provide the opportunity to acquire the specific competences anticipated by an employer. The problem of persons not being mentally ready to take on a job after having been out of the labour market for an extended period was also discussed.
- Social skills training is not popularised enough, and the training that is provided is mostly addressed to only a narrow audience, for example, managers. Some of the participants indicated

that a significant number of employers in Poland (in particular from small and medium-sized firms) do not value the social skills of their employees. While it is true that only as of recently, training financed from the European Social Fund generally includes a module on the so-called soft skills, Polish companies often do not appreciate the importance of such topics and do not participate in such training.

- Unequal treatment by government of entities offering training – according to debate participants, institutions functioning within the school and higher education systems are preferred both in the legal framework as well as in receiving financing (also including financing from public funds). Meanwhile, some participants are of the opinion that this results in inequalities experienced by non-formal education in the field of adult learning, which does not benefit from such support. The issue of socialising adults through non-formal education was also raised – according to some participants, a behavioural development function is also fulfilled by training.
- Lack of training needs analyses, resulting in a training offer that is not aligned with the requirements of the labour market and the individual needs of employers.
- Perceiving training courses as ineffective.
- Insufficient information about the training courses – some participants feel that it is difficult for potential training participants to assess the training offer (to obtain reliable information) prior to commencing a particular course.

2.6. Institutional and legal barriers

During the discussion, debate participants pointed attention to the existence of the following institutional and legal barriers:

- The lack of reliable tools for assessing the quality of the qualifications obtained in the non-formal education system and through informal learning.
- The lack of a uniform system of educational and vocational guidance – currently, separate laws regulate the guidance counselling systems of schools and higher education, while another set governs the system of vocational guidance counselling. As a result, different guidance systems are functioning simultaneously.
- Imprecise VAT regulations for services provided by training companies – as of January 1, 2011, a 23% uniform VAT was introduced for training services. At the same time, exemption from this tax was maintained for certain services provided by educational institutions. According to several debate participants, as a result of the lack of transparency in the regulations, there is no certainty about which training is subject to VAT and which should be exempt. This situation not only disrupts sales and competition, but also adversely affects access to improving qualifications in Poland.
- Ambiguous regulations concerning the activities of private educational institutions, leading to divergent interpretations (also among officials) and seriously restricting access of adults to education. For example, there is no uniform interpretation of article 82, paragraph 2, item 3 of the School Education Act of 7 September 1991 (Journal of Laws 2004, No. 256, item 2572 with later amendments) concerning the requirement to enter the address of a given facility into public records. In interpreting this provision, some local government units believe that an institution can carry out its services throughout the township, while others state that the activities can take place only at the address submitted to the records office.
- Standards of requirements for a qualification very often lack the requirement to update knowledge and skills. As an example, participants cited the energy industry, where professional qualifications are often acquired “once for a lifetime”.
- The requirement to use the Polish language in examinations – it was indicated that it is often not possible to take an exam with the assistance of an interpreter in the technical occupations. This limits the access of foreign specialists to the market, and thereby reduces competition (which

in turn affects the attainment of new qualifications by native specialists) and inhibits the flow of knowledge and professional experience.

- Lack of harmonisation of the regulations on the classification of occupations – currently in Poland, there are three different sets:
 - the classification of vocational school occupations (208 occupations),
 - the classification of occupations and specialisations for the needs of the labour market (about 2,300 occupations),
 - the classification of regulated professions (about 300).

The requirements for qualifications described within each classification are not comparable to each other. According to debate participants, the lack of coherence between these systems further exacerbates the gap between what schools teach and the labour market needs. According to debate participants, classifying qualifications according to uniform criteria (e.g. learning outcomes) would address this problem.

- The lack of a uniform system of accreditation – currently in Poland there are no uniform and consistent procedures for ensuring and monitoring the quality of training institutions.
- The lack of renewing accreditation for training institutions – according to participants of the debate, accreditation is granted on a permanent basis in most cases, which does not allow for ensuring and maintaining the quality of the training conducted.

2.7. Financial barriers

Discussion participants also differentiated several financial barriers:

- Lack of resources – persons who wish to raise their qualifications often do not have sufficient financial resources to do so.
- “Narrow” criteria for awarding funds from the European Social Fund – the first projects financed by the ESF had much more liberal strategic criteria (projects aimed at small, medium and large companies, beneficiaries from 25 to 64 years of age). Currently, the strategic criteria are narrower, for example, over 45 years of age, only the small and medium-sized enterprise sector, etc.
- Limited funding provided by employers for workers’ training – according to some debate participants, this situation stems on one hand from the low awareness of employers, and on the other hand, from the limited systemic support provided to entrepreneurs. An example of a desired solution is to create a mechanism enabling the “valuation” of qualifications held by workers, and then allowing these qualifications to be “depreciated”, thereby encouraging entrepreneurs to invest in human capital. In the opinion of participants, determining objective criteria that permit employees’ qualifications to be measured could be a tool for pricing the human capital of the company, which in turn should translate into its value.

2.8. Other factors deterring persons from deciding to pursue learning

During the discussion, debate participants pointed to other negative factors:

- A lax system of granting disability status – according to debate participants, people who do not wish to be active in the labour market can quite easily obtain a judgment declaring them disabled. This ensures them with a certain income, but obviously discourages professional and educational activity.
- A lack of good quality research on the labour market, particularly at the regional level – there are currently no uniform and systematically performed analyses of the labour market at the regional level, including forecasts of the demand for labour and supply of work. As a result, a sound diagnosis of the labour market situation is unavailable, making assessments of the actual demand for qualifications difficult. Thus, there are no positive incentives compelling people to acquire new skills.

Part 2. The potential impact of the qualifications system 2.9. Possible methods of reducing the factors deterring adults from deciding to pursue learning while professionally active or upon retirement

2.9. Possible methods of reducing the factors deterring adults from deciding to pursue learning while professionally active or upon retirement

After reviewing the barriers to lifelong learning existing in Poland, participants proposed a variety of remedial actions. Three meetings were devoted to these issues.

Various sub-groups worked on proposals for solutions with regard to:

- developing awareness of the needs and motivations for learning,
- institutional, legal and financial determinants,
- the functioning of the formal general, vocational and higher education systems,
- the functioning of non-formal education (including training workshops, courses, etc. organised outside of the formal general, vocational and higher education systems).

This enabled all of the previously discussed categories of barriers to be addressed. The results of the sub-groups' work were presented in a forum and discussed by all participants.

Proposed solutions often touched more than one area, with the boundaries between them overlapping. The results of this phase of work are presented in the subsections below.

2.10. Proposed activities to develop the motivation for lifelong learning

Participants proposed the preparation of a "strategy for social development" which would consist of:

- Building a uniform system of guidance counselling. The need was noted for coordination between the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Science and Higher Education.
- Developing attitudes among pupils aimed at making a conscious choice of a career path. In the opinion of participants, young people are not prepared to make such choices, which negatively affects their motivation for learning.
- Strengthening the motivation for learning, among others by working in groups, building pupils' positive self-assessment and strengthening their faith in their strengths, promoting attitudes that accept readiness for change, focusing on the aim as well as on developing and working with values, training from the first grades of primary schools in the so-called soft skills.
- Strengthening the cooperation of schools with employers, organising job fairs and meetings between pupils and experts from the labour market, etc.
- Better preparing teachers to work with pupils. The teacher should support the individual development of the pupil. Participants of the debate stressed the necessity to have the teacher use knowledge of such fields as sociology and psychology (it was proposed that the pedagogue and psychologist be involved in training the teaching staff) and the importance of well-operating systemic mechanisms supporting teachers.
- Social and professional activation consistent with the needs of the labour market, as well as with the skills and preferences of individuals. Attention was given to the role of these activities in integrating education with the labour market.
- Promoting "a trend for learning" in order to overcome the reluctance of adults and to put an end to the negative image of the professional education of adults. The portrayal of certain social groups must be changed and a media campaign should be carried out to popularise "the trend for learning".

Additionally, the following proposals were formulated in the course of the discussions:

- Change from a negative assessment system of pupils (this assessment system is obligatory from the 4th grade of primary school) to a positive assessment system (descriptive).
- Introduce solutions conducive to increasing the motivation of teachers. One of these would be a change in working conditions, such as reducing class size, which, however, would be linked to increasing the requirements related to the quality of teaching.

During the debate, the belief was expressed that the Polish Qualifications Framework will positively impact the motivation for learning.

2.11. Proposals related to institutional, legal and financial issues

Debate participants formulated the following postulates on limiting the institutional, legal and financial barriers:

- A universally accepted and applied system of renewing the accreditation of training institutions should be introduced. Participants argued that although an accreditation system already exists, information about it is not sufficiently known. It was also noted that although a rigorous selection of criteria required to attain accreditation is desirable, it should not lead to an overly bureaucratized legal framework impacting opportunities for learning. Participants came to the conclusion that the Polish Qualifications Framework can be a tool for improving the delivery of training as a result of having adopted premises that institute mechanisms for the validation of learning outcomes and quality assurance (both of the qualifications themselves and the process of attaining them).
- In order to improve the quality of training services, external examinations should be introduced that confirm the competence acquired through the non-formal education system. Participants in the discussion stated that learning outcomes should be confirmed by one examination carried out in suitably equipped centres. An external evaluation would permit an objective assessment to be made of the quality of the courses offered by a training company.
- Uniform and clear rules for cooperation in the field of vocational education between the Ministry of National Education and the Ministry of the Economy need to be developed, existing cooperation in this field must be strengthened and funding for this area of education should be increased from the budget of the Ministry of the Economy. According to debate participants, the Ministry of the Economy should have a greater impact on vocational training, because education in this field has a direct bearing on the functioning of the labour market and the economy. A way of achieving this aim would be to develop transparent and coherent principles of cooperation and boundaries of responsibilities between the Ministry of National Education and the Ministry of the Economy. At the same time, participants stressed that creating a modern vocational education system requires greater funding. At the next meeting, it was proposed that the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy should also be involved in this cooperation, as it is responsible for administering the Labour Fund that finances, among other things, the wages of working youths (most of whom are employed in small craft industries) and vocational preparation programs for adults. Furthermore, attention was brought to an alternative method of the practical training of juveniles, where part of the training takes place at school and part in the workplace.
- Introduce the principle of renewing qualifications. Participants in the debate from the first meeting emphasised that laws in Poland are quickly changed. In the meantime, once a qualification is awarded, its subsequent verification is not required. This leads to a situation in which holders of the same qualification can vary in the knowledge and skills they possess. The participants proposed a solution of introducing requirements to upgrade knowledge and skills by persons having been awarded a qualification. The role of the PQF was pointed out as a tool forcing curricula to be adapted to the needs of a changing economy.
- Expand ongoing monitoring of the labour market. Currently, there are few institutions conducting ongoing analyses and prognoses of the situation in the labour market. In the opinion of the debate participants, observatories of the labour market would function more effectively if they strengthened their cooperation with employers in collecting information, rather than basing their work mainly on officially registered data, for example. It was acknowledged that with the PQF, the accuracy of the currently existing forecasting tools could be increased (if according to the accepted premise, the qualifications to be submitted to the qualifications register will be those of an already existing demand or those that will be in demand in the future).

Part 2. The potential impact of the qualifications system 2.12. Proposals related to the functioning of the formal general, vocational and higher education systems

Additionally the following proposals were made during the discussions:

- Ensure greater stability of the law. Changes in laws occurring too frequently prevent the development of effective ways to promote lifelong learning.
- Give greater importance to existing certifications and quality standards of training entities. Participants in the debate noted that the present accreditation process is an imperfect instrument and is not applicable in areas where knowledge quickly becomes obsolete. According to the participants, the quality of training centres in the field of new technologies is guaranteed not by accreditation, but by having the appropriate certification (e.g. ISO).
- Use alternative ways of organising teaching in vocational training in order to eliminate the problems associated with the inadequate number of practical sessions and lack of access to new and expensive technologies. Some examples provided include to have schools contract with manufacturers of the devices to be used in the training and to create schools at workplaces that would prepare their future personnel. The planned sectoral centres of vocational education were also mentioned. The French experience in education was referred to, where practical sessions for various courses (not just vocational) are held in external centres adapted to provide these types of experiences. All of these solutions would help eliminate the problem of inadequate facilities and equipment, which vocational education and training is now experiencing.

2.12. Proposals related to the functioning of the formal general, vocational and higher education systems

During the debate, participants also developed proposals to limit the barriers resulting from the functioning of the formal general, vocational and higher education systems, such as:

- Change to a model where the school teaches how to develop knowledge. This requires a departure from the model of only transmitting knowledge. Under the guidance of the teacher, pupils should actively participate in the process of acquiring knowledge and derive information from many sources, with the help of various methods. Only in this way will they be able to acquire the skill of independent learning.
- Individualise teaching. Working group participants were aware that implementing this proposal will encounter many difficulties. Hence the proposed solution of implementing individual pupil portfolios to demonstrate the best way of mastering the required content, using the project method and introducing one day of work at home into the weekly plan of the pupil.
- Change the criteria for evaluating the work of the school, increase pressure for internal evaluations and depart from the practice of external examinations (or change their format). Participants emphasised that external examination results currently influence the position of a school in rankings, often leading to training pupils to perform well on exams and not to develop knowledge and skills.
- Change the way teachers are trained and school directors are appointed. Most debate participants believe that this is a necessary step towards improving the quality of education because the skills expected in the work of the teacher differ from those required in the work of a school director.
- In addition to the achievements gained at school, include skills acquired through the non-formal education system and informal learning into a pupil's portfolio. Applying such a solution not only will allow the mutual complementarity of formal, non-formal education and informal learning in the life of a pupil, it will also promote attitudes of learning outside of school, and in the longer term, of lifelong learning.

Additionally, the following proposals were made during the discussions:

- Strengthen cooperation between the education system and entrepreneurs in order to facilitate the entry of graduates into the labour market.
- Train teachers on the use of new teaching techniques and available information technologies.
- Introduce new standards of communication with parents, teachers and pupils. Participants stressed the need to improve information sharing in school. The absence of effective solutions in

Part 2. The potential impact of the qualifications system

2.13. Proposals related to the functioning of non-formal education

this area negatively affects student motivation and the effectiveness of learning. Parents do not have full information about their child's situation in school, teachers are not aware of the pupil's environment. This makes it difficult to provide eventually needed assistance.

2.13. Proposals related to the functioning of non-formal education

Participants proposed the following items to improve the functioning of non-formal education:

- Unify training programs.
- Introduce a universal and coherent system of accreditation.
- Introduce internal and external examinations at the end of each training program to verify the knowledge and skills acquired by the participant.
- According to the participants in the discussions, training workshops on the same subject often differ in the number of hours and scope of the content. Their quality could be ensured by accreditation and external evaluation.
- Use an individualised approach in working with unemployed persons by cooperating with a career counsellor who would direct the client to appropriate training; have experienced workers of pre-retirement age train newly hired persons (an example of this was presented that was very well assessed by the discussion participants, with the provision, however, that implementing such an idea is largely dependent on the employer).
- Introduce solutions to ensure that the learning outcomes of soft skills are measurable.
- Raise awareness among employers about the value of soft skills training – carry out a public campaign to increase understanding of the need to raise employees' soft skills and to promote their practical use in work.
- Provide the means to recognise competences regardless of the form of learning.
- Introduce tax relief for employers who organise training for their employees.
- Make the VAT tax consistent within the training market.
- Increase the cooperation of employers with local authorities to invest in human capital.
- Broaden the use of labour market analyses when developing training offers. Debate participants provided examples from Gdynia and Koszalin, where the most complete as possible information about the training market is made available at the employment offices and units of local government.

2.14. Other proposals

Debate participants also offered the following proposals:

- Study the fate of graduates, which would answer the question about the extent to which the completed school (or course) provided young people with the chance to find work and whether or not they are effective as employees (currently, the average vocational school graduate spends approximately two years looking for work in his/her field).
- Open up the public service sector to work with the private sector.
- Disseminate knowledge of good practices.
- Create a working team that would analyse curricula and the system of teacher training from the perspective of developing attitudes conducive to lifelong learning. It was noted that developing training geared to the needs of the labour market will be increasingly difficult due to the pace of change in the economy.

2.15. Summary of the group discussions

During the debate, participants pointed to the very important systemic role of the PQF from the point of view of employers' interests, as a tool to "measure and value" the qualifications of workers. It was noted that the framework could be one of the tools that enables an estimation to be made

of the value of an enterprise inclusive of its human capital. This is of particular importance for companies listed in the stock market. This issue, in the opinion of debate participants, may impact the attitudes of employers in their approach to training employees and significantly influence changes in these attitudes, because this will impact their business in an obvious way. During the discussion, it was emphasised that the global economy is governed by its own rules. The variability of the portfolio of orders forces entrepreneurs to adopt appropriate strategies of human resource management. Employers require ever greater freedom to develop their relations with employees on one hand, but also, improving worker competences takes on greater significance.

It was also noted that learning should not only be perceived as a way to adapt to the labour market. Lifelong learning is to serve the most broadly understood concept of personal development, and not just an individual's professional competences.

Part 3. The system for validating learning outcomes and the mechanisms of qualifications' quality assurance

Meetings of the third group were led by Elżbieta Lechowicz and Katarzyna Trawińska-Konador of the Educational Research Institute. Dr. Tomasz Saryusz-Wolski was the expert for this thematic area. The discussions were facilitated by Robert Boch, with the assistance of Magdalena Formanowicz. The third thematic group worked on issues related to validating learning outcomes and the quality assurance of qualifications.

The discussions were divided into two parts:

- The first part was an attempt to identify various known existing practices of validating learning outcomes in Poland.⁹ Methods used and desired solutions were discussed.
- In the second part, proposals were formulated to enable a comprehensive system of validation to be established, as well as principles ensuring the quality of qualifications.

In the course of all the meetings there was broad consensus that transparency and the recognition of qualifications in the labour market require the reliable validation of learning outcomes. The importance and relevance of solutions for ensuring the quality of qualifications and the need to strive for the development of solutions comprising integral elements of the national qualification system were particularly stressed in the discussions.

3.1. Information on validation presented to group participants

Establishing the national qualifications system is aimed at providing opportunities for the broader consideration and the formal documentation of new competences acquired in very different ways throughout life. To achieve this, it is essential to develop a system of validating learning outcomes achieved outside of the formal education system.

The current status of validation in Poland was depicted together with its strengths and shortcomings. The legal regulations and functioning validation procedures for the formal general, vocational (internal and external assessments) and higher education (internal evaluation) systems were presented. Special attention was given to the educational reform of the late 1990s, where responsibility for the upper secondary school completion exams (*matura*) and exams certifying occupational qualifications were transferred to external assessment institutions. External tests were also introduced at the completion of primary school and lower secondary school.

With regard to non-formal education and informal learning, individual regulations related to validation were cited; participants stressed their dispersed character and the lack of comprehensive regulations governing all of these types of activities in Poland. Initiatives were mentioned that emerged as grass-roots responses to the needs of the labour market in this area. These include, among others, numerous projects of validating learning outcomes acquired as a result of informal learning and non-formal education, corporate and sectoral practices, as well as various options for obtaining certificates issued by different entities. At the moment, there is no national standard of quality assurance for non-formal and informal learning in Poland. These shortcomings are clearly visible against the background of the already existing or developing regulations in this area in other European Union countries.

The principles of validation and quality assurance mechanisms were discussed in the broader context of policy development promoting lifelong learning. Also indicated were European documents on lifelong learning strategies that constitute the basis for establishing the European field of lifelong learning.

⁹ During the public debate, the term "confirming learning outcomes" was used as the proposed Polish translation of the English word "validation". During work on "A Glossary of Key Concepts related to the National Qualifications System" the term *walidacja* [validation] was ultimately accepted.

In Poland, the principles of acting on behalf of lifelong learning (LLL) are presented in the strategic document entitled “Perspectives for lifelong learning”. The most important include:

- The acknowledgement that for LLL policy, the person is most important – a person who is learning, and not an institution or system, is the main point of interest; education and training is adjusted to the individual needs of learners.
- An open approach to qualifications – this approach relies on recognising qualifications, irrespective of the place, manner and time in which the competence was acquired as a requirement for a given qualification.
- Learning applies to everyone – learning as an important component of being active in life concerns not only pupils, students and attendees of courses, it also applies to persons who have not been at the centre of interest of traditional education policies, that is, working persons, economically inactive persons, seniors, and also small children.
- A broad approach to learning – this is based on valuing various forms of learning – not only in the formal education system, but also through the path of informal learning. The best results are achieved by combining the possibilities afforded by the various forms of learning.

To achieve these objectives, the European Union recommended that Member States use a variety of tools it developed, among the most important being the European Qualifications Framework and the national qualifications frameworks established in individual member states.

3.2. Existing practices of validating learning outcomes in Poland

Participants representing various sectors, organizations and educational areas shared their diverse experiences in validating learning outcomes and ensuring the quality of qualifications in their fields of activity. Presentations of these experiences were made during the meetings and specially prepared materials were distributed. Such an approach allowed participants to become acquainted with the many ways of carrying out validation and quality assurance. Detailed analyses were made of four specific examples used in Poland, described in more detail in the appendices:

- The Vocational Training Centre [Zakład Doskonalenia Zawodowego] from Bydgoszcz presented its Trans-VAE project on the validation of competences acquired in the education system, non-formal education and informal learning in the area of personal care (Annex 3).
- The Polish Information Processing Society presented the certification system for computer science skills compatible with the European system, based on the CEPIS¹⁰ license (Annex 4).
- The Confederation of Construction and Real Estate [Konfederacja Budownictwa i Nieruchomości] discussed the recognition of occupational qualifications acquired in the non-formal education system and through informal learning using the example of their construction unit (Annex 5).
- The Polish Craft Association shared their experiences with validation in the craft trades (Annex 6).

3.3. Proposals to establish a comprehensive validation and quality assurance system

During the debate, a proposed plan of the validation process was discussed. It was stressed that the aim of creating a national qualifications system in Poland is to facilitate and support lifelong learning. This requires that the same learning outcomes be treated in the same way regardless of how they were attained (learning through the formal education system, the non-formal education system or informal learning). The accuracy of the English word validator (in Polish – *kasownik*) was pointed out – a device that makes a ticket valid. In a similar way, competences become important only to the extent that they are validated – confirmed in a formal way – in other words, when they become a qualification (an example of this is an examination confirming the attainment of occupational competences, where a positive outcome results in the awarding of a technician’s diploma in a particular field).

¹⁰ Council of European Professional Informatics Societies.

Part 3. The system of validating learning outcomes

3.3. Proposals to establish a comprehensive validation and quality assurance system

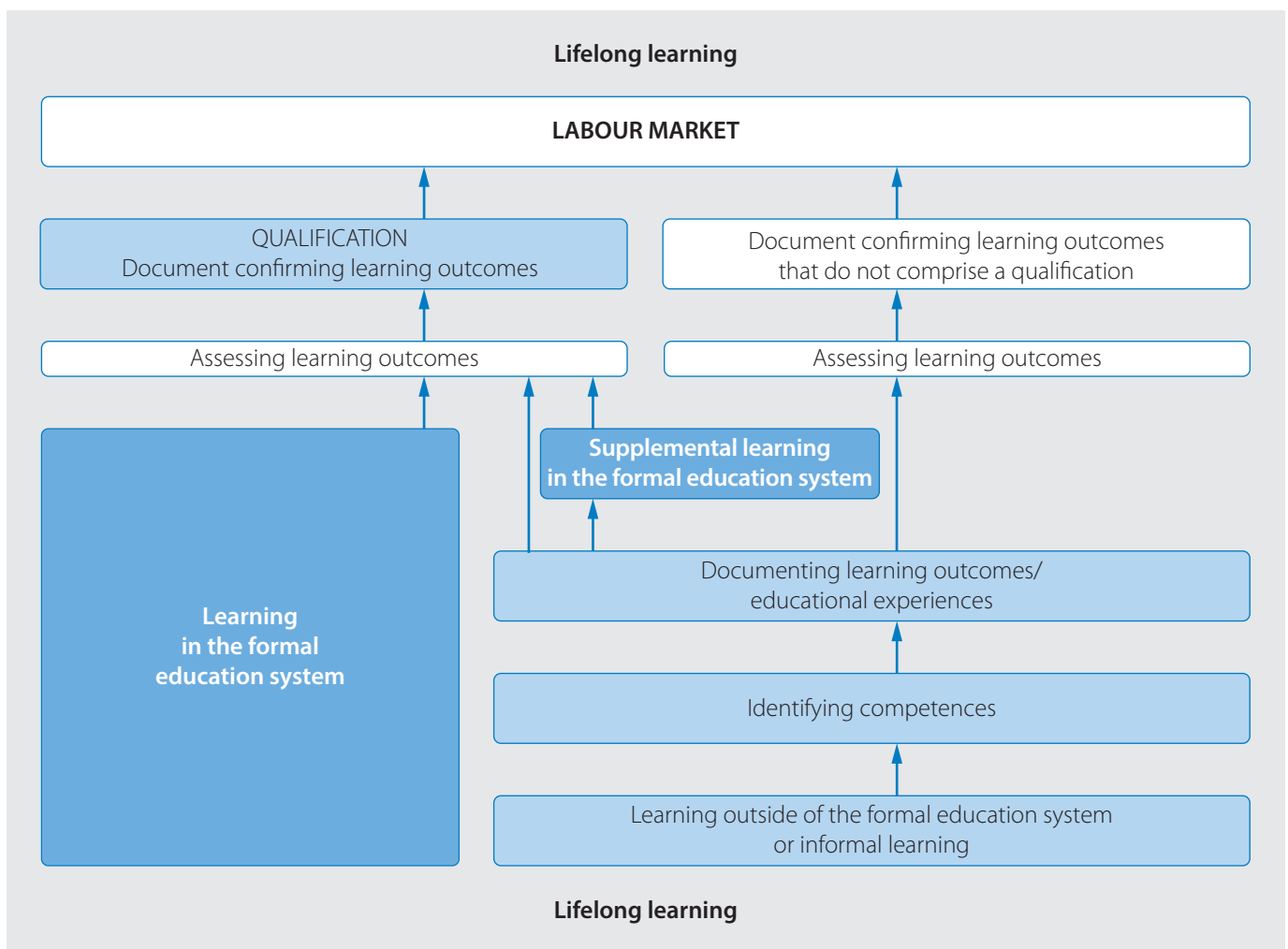
Participants agreed that the process of validation is comprised of the following stages:

- identify the learning outcomes,
- document the identified effects,
- assess the attained learning outcomes,
- compare the assessed learning outcomes with the qualification’s standards (requirements),
- issue a document awarding the qualification.

The validation process occurs in abbreviated form in the case of learning in the formal education system because there is no need to identify the learning outcomes as they have already been defined by the curriculum or required procedures (see Figure 1).

An important conclusion of the discussions is the acknowledgement that a validation system which encompasses all the learning outcomes needed in the labour market will only function effectively when the remaining elements of the national qualifications system have been implemented, including the Integrated Qualifications Register – a fundamental instrument of this system.

Figure 1. General diagram of attaining a qualification (p. 29)



Other topics were also discussed:

- Participants considered different variants of financing validation. Most participants liked the proposal of having validation be a self-financing system (getting a driver’s license was invoked as an example). Such a system would have to take into account solutions supporting specific groups of persons, for example, the unemployed (in this case, the possibility of financial support from funds earmarked for activating unemployed persons).

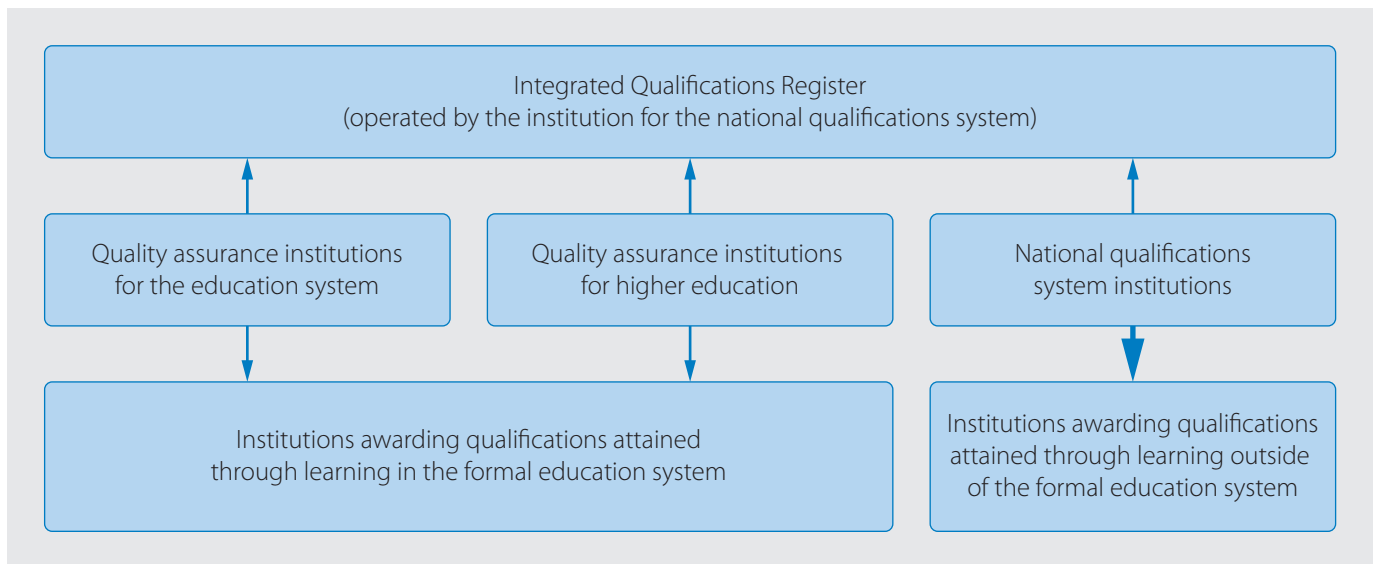
Part 3. The system of validating learning outcomes

3.3. Proposals to establish a comprehensive validation and quality assurance system

- The fundamental meaning of individuals becoming aware of their actual competences, understanding the purpose of learning and the importance of the role of a career counsellor were emphasised.
- It was noted that new learning outcomes exist and will continue to appear (in response to the needs of the labour market), which at this stage are not yet used as the basis to award qualifications, but which should not be “ignored” by the system for the good of the economy and the development of society. For this reason, the possibility of issuing documents validating such learning outcomes should be foreseen (while maintaining the universally required principles of quality assurance).

According to the participants of the discussion, establishing a comprehensive validation system requires institutional coordination. In the introductory presentation opening this part of the discussion, the following diagram was presented:

Figure 2.



Currently, an Integrated Qualifications Register and institutions responsible for ensuring quality in non-formal education and informal learning are missing. The debate participants were informed that this gap will be filled by an institution, whose concept is currently being prepared as part of “The development of terms of reference for the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework and the National Qualifications Register for lifelong learning” Project.

The main tasks planned for this institution in the area of validation include:

- operating the Integrated Qualifications Register,
- monitoring and also supervising, within an established scope, quality assurance procedures for the qualifications awarded in Poland.

The future law on the national qualifications system should define the most important principles of qualifications’ quality assurance common to all institutions. Solutions of ensuring quality should be designed in such a way as to guarantee the acquisition of learning outcomes required for a given qualification. It will be necessary to develop and implement solutions in quality assurance that will also assist the process of entering a given qualification into the Integrated Qualifications Register. The Integrated Qualifications Register will contain all qualifications awarded in Poland and included in the qualifications system (i.e. assigned to an appropriate qualification level), regardless of already existing and newly created registers within the trades, professional communities or other lists. The register will use other databases containing information about qualifications. The register will be

Part 3. The system of validating learning outcomes

3.3. Proposals to establish a comprehensive validation and quality assurance system

required to include full qualifications, as well as selected partial qualifications (e.g. a single qualification that is part of the standard for a given profession). It is also expected that some of the partial qualifications will also be required to be entered into the register. This relates to qualifications that are especially significant from the perspective of ensuring the safety of persons, (for example, pilot, driver or electrician) and qualifications in the regulated professions.

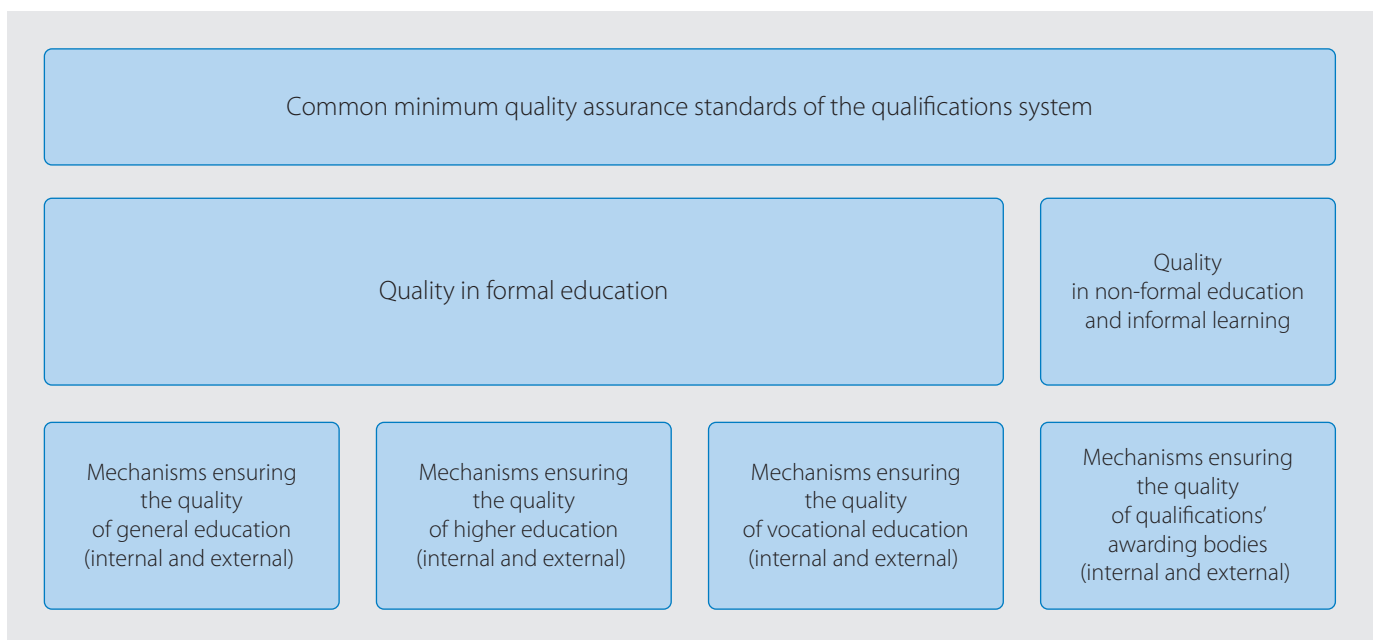
The inventory of qualifications having special significance for safety will be determined in advance (taking into account the viewpoints of social partners) and included in regulations of the law on the qualifications system. These regulations will also define the maximum period required for entering a qualification into the register.

In the case of the remaining partial qualifications, registration will be conducted at the request of the entity/group of entities interested in awarding the qualification based on the procedure set forth in the law. The decision to enter a particular qualification into the register will be made by the institution for the national qualifications system. The criterion will be an assessment of the documentation presented by the applicant, based on the provisions included in the law. The applicant will have the right to appeal the decision of the institution according to the provisions of administrative law. The appropriate body of the national administration will serve as the entity reviewing the appeal.

The information presented on the quality assurance system and the qualifications register were not discussed further.

The general scheme of qualifications quality assurance is illustrated as follows:

Figure 3.



Part 4. Summary of the first stage of the debate

The public debate allowed a number of key elements significant for the Polish Qualifications Framework to be discussed by the group of stakeholders of the qualifications system, including:

- terminology,
- the manner of describing elements of the system,
- coherence of the PQF,
- all paths of learning through formal and non-formal education, as well as informal learning,
- basic barriers to lifelong learning and the potential role of the PQF in reducing them,
- proposed scheme of validating competences,
- the quality assurance of qualifications.

An important result of the debate was also the involvement of stakeholders in developing the methodology of establishing the qualifications system and Polish Qualifications Framework. By participating in discussions and presenting their actual experiences, participants made a significant contribution to adapting the proposed systemic solutions to needs, on one hand and, on the other hand, to already existing practices.

An important result of the debate was also developing a common language to communicate about issues related to the new qualifications system.

This report summarises the achievements of this debate, but dialogue on building the new qualifications system and work on the proposed Polish Qualifications Framework will continue. As the next proposals for solutions are developed, subsequent consultation meetings with stakeholders are planned. Debate participants will also be receiving information about project activities and their results. This will allow on-going verification to be conducted of the developed solutions incorporating the viewpoint of stakeholders' needs and capacities.

Part 5. Discussion about the proposed Polish Qualifications Framework, including the descriptors typical for vocational education and sectoral qualifications frameworks

The meetings of this thematic group were led by Dr. Agnieszka Chłoń-Domińczak. Dr. Stanisław Sławiński was the expert of the group.

The group's first meeting took place on February 8, 2012. Progress of NQS experts' work in developing a table of universal descriptors for the levels of the Polish Qualifications Framework was presented. Dr. Agnieszka Chłoń-Domińczak presented the current table of universal descriptors and the table of second stage generic descriptors for levels 1–4 of general and vocational education. The major changes presented in both these tables provoked a lively discussion, during which the need to harmonise the provisions of the PQF with the new core curriculum developed by the Ministry of National Education was stressed. Dr. Chłoń-Domińczak dispelled the fears expressed in this context, stating that all project results are presented to the Ministry for its approval. Debate participants expressed their concern that formal education will dominate the descriptors in the framework. It was agreed that during subsequent debate meetings, the descriptors will be supplemented with elements essential to non-formal education and informal learning. It was also proposed to include descriptors relating to language skills (understood as the skills of using a foreign language) in vocational education.

In the course of further discussions, it turned out that the wording used in the descriptors of "very simple", "not very simple" are unclear to some debate participants because of the difficulty of their interpretation and evaluation. Dr. Chłoń-Domińczak explained that the use of gradation adjectives results from the need to describe the eight levels of the framework. Interpreting the descriptors will be reflected in the descriptions of the learning outcomes relevant to a specific qualification.

It was agreed that each PQF level will be analysed at the next meeting.

5.1. About the language of the Polish Qualifications Framework level descriptors

The next meeting was held on April 10, 2012. IBE experts presented second stage generic descriptors for PQF levels 1 and 2 for general and vocational education.

The discussion continued the debate from the previous meeting. The issue of the complexity of the descriptor tables was raised. In the opinion of the debate participants, they are difficult to understand and further changes only exacerbated this situation. The framework was made more difficult to read not only by introducing different stages of genericness (that is, differentiating the extent of a descriptor's detail by taking into account the qualification's field of activity) but also by including the auxiliary categories of knowledge, skills and social competence. Participants also warned that the excessively complex language used for the descriptors may discourage PQF users and at the same time make the framework difficult to understand.

Dr. Agnieszka Chłoń-Domińczak and Dr. Stanisław Sławiński argued that the qualifications framework contains general descriptions, but that if the level of generality is too high, many stakeholders will not be able to use the PQF. For this reason, the attempt was made to develop succinct descriptors while simultaneously maintaining a certain degree of detail. This was one of the reasons that various stages of generic descriptors were introduced.

In terms of the terminology used, Dr. Chłoń-Domińczak and Dr. Sławiński argued that a new vocabulary is now being developed, and problems in understanding it are to be expected and cannot be

avoided. To a certain extent, this is related to the issue of consistently applying certain conventions. On the other hand, at this current stage of work, all comments will be considered and none of the descriptors are final.

During the debate, the relationship among qualifications and privileges were discussed (diplomas and certificates). It was noted that certain privileges are linked to a number of qualifications, especially those found at the upper levels of the PQF. However, the categories of qualifications and privileges are not synonymous.

Debate participants suggested that verbs be used consistently in the descriptors – especially in the category of social competence. On one hand, this will enable linguistic awkwardness to be avoided, while on the other hand, it will allow effects to be described that are measurable, improving the overall functionality of the framework. During the meeting, a proposal was made to analyse all of the universal descriptors in terms of their agreement with the European Qualifications Framework descriptors. Participants expressed concern that inconsistencies could lead to a situation where qualifications assigned to a specific PQF level may be attributed to an inappropriate level in another country.

In response, Dr. Agnieszka Chłoń-Domińczak and Dr. Stanisław Sławiński argued that the inconsistencies are spurious, resulting from imperfections in official translations. Because of the need to be able to compare various national qualifications frameworks at an international level, work is underway to unify the manner of describing descriptors in various countries.

5.2. Summary of the group discussion

During the work on descriptors typical for vocational education, the comments of sectoral teams were also taken into consideration to verify the proposals for assigning PQF levels to a qualification and to determine its initial level.

Recommendations and the results of meeting discussions were taken into account in formulating the final proposals of level descriptors. These entries reflect the conclusions developed during work on initially assigning levels to selected qualifications in sectors, which also involved participants of the public debate.

Part 6. Discussion about the principles of assigning qualifications to levels in the Polish Qualifications Framework

Meetings of the second thematic group were led by Horacy Dębowski, Wojciech Stęchły and Gabriela Ziewiec from the Educational Research Institute – members of the team responsible for developing the principles of entering a qualification into the Integrated Qualifications Register and assigning PQF levels to qualifications.

During the meeting of February 7, 2012 at the “Dialogue” Centre for Social Partnership in Warsaw, discussions took place on the principles of assigning qualifications to different levels of the Polish Qualifications Framework and entering them into the Integrated Qualification Register, as well as on the standards of describing qualifications.

Participants deliberated, among others, on the following issues:

- What should be the conditions for entering existing qualifications, confirmed by a diploma or certificate, into the Integrated Qualifications Register?
- Will it be possible to enter into the new system old diplomas and certificates that describe the field and duration of studies and not the learning outcomes? How should a diploma, the *matura* certificate or a driver’s licence be described? What should be the standard for describing a qualifications?
- What is its role?
- What should be the criteria for assessing the quality of qualifications?
- What should be the scope of the information provided by the qualifications register?
- Which entities will be able to submit a qualification to the qualifications register?

During the discussion, it was stated that different countries have adopted different solutions for the issues under consideration. Horacy Dębowski, IBE expert, pointed to the example of Ireland, where a framework has been in force for a long time, and the standard of including a qualification in the register is determined by a special public institution. This institution also develops qualifications in response to substantiated needs, is responsible for entering qualifications into a register and ensuring the quality of the learning outcomes.

Additional issues raised during further discussions were equally important:

- Should qualifications included in the register have a specific volume? Should the volume be specified in terms of the amount of work required to attain a qualification? Who should be responsible for determining the volume (for example, the institution submitting a qualification to the register, the assessing and certifying institution, or another institution)?
- Should the criterion of a minimum volume be adopted to be able to assign a qualification to a PQF level – in other words, should each diploma awarded after a one-week course be entered into the qualifications register? In Scotland, for example, attaining a learning outcome must take at least 10 hours and be assessed with a test. Who should determine the minimum volume – the institution submitting a qualification to the register or the assessing and certifying institution?
- Will setting a minimum volume for a qualification help avoid the fragmentation of the qualifications register, that is, having very small sets of learning outcomes entered into the register? Should other safeguards be developed to prevent this, for example, by instituting even a minimal fee for entering a qualification into the register?
- Should the institution submitting a qualification for entry into the register be its legal owner? Does this mean that in consequence, such an institution will be the only one authorised to offer training for this qualification and certify it?

The discussion on the standard of describing a qualification led to deliberations on the scope and type of information required for the national register. IBE experts reminded participants that those countries with a functioning qualifications framework sometimes charge a high fee to register a qualification (e.g. in Scotland, the procedure lasts one year, registration costs £5000). The last questions concerning the ownership of qualifications and opportunities for training and certification are subject to expert analyses being carried out in IBE. Most debate participants were of the opinion that free market principles would be violated if other firms were prohibited from offering the training. They emphasised that qualifications are a public good. Owners of qualifications should be rather the institution assessing the qualification, and not, for example, the training firm applying to have a qualification entered into the register. It is also extremely important for the level and credibility of the assessing and awarding institutions to be very high.

6.1. Information on ECTS

The next meeting of public debate group 2 was held on March 21, 2012 at the Educational Research Institute. It was devoted to a discussion on how to determine the volume of qualifications using the example of the ECTS¹¹ and ECVET¹² systems, as well as information about the qualifications in the Integrated Qualifications Register.

The meeting was divided into two parts. During the first part, Wojciech Stęchły from IBE made a presentation entitled "ECTS, ECVET: European systems of credit transfer and accumulation". Maciej Frączek (Director of the Institute for the Certification of Professional Accountants of the Association of Accountants in Poland) presented on "Recognising professional qualifications by the Association of Accountants in Poland. Assigning qualifications to levels in the Polish Qualifications Framework". In the second part of the meeting, Roksana Pierwieniecka of IBE presented a table containing proposed information about the qualifications to be included in the Integrated Qualifications Register. Discussions on the type and scope of information about qualifications were continued at the meeting of group 2 on May 25, 2012.

6.2. Summary of the group discussion

During the debate, participants pointed to the need to standardise the description of a qualification. This will enable relevant qualifications to be entered into the register, those that can be attained through various types of education and learning, and at the same time limit the number of inappropriate submittals. As a result of the discussion, it was agreed that "work load" is worth using as a criterion to determine a qualification's volume.

In terms of the ownership of qualifications, most debate participants stated that prohibiting firms from offering training for a particular qualification if they weren't the entity that submitted the qualification for registration would violate the principles of a free market. It was also emphasised that qualifications are a public good. In addition, it was proposed that the owner of a qualification should be the qualification's awarding body rather than, for example, the training institution and entity submitting the qualification for entry into the register. It was agreed that it is extremely important for the assessing and awarding institution to have a high level of credibility.

¹¹ European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System.

¹² European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training.

Part 7. Principles of the national qualifications system and the qualifications register, including the principles of involving stakeholders, validation and quality assurance

Meetings of the third group were led by Elżbieta Lechowicz, Katarzyna Trawińska-Konador, Dr. Magdalena Dybaś, Dr. Ewa Bacia and Dr. Tomasz Saryusz-Wolski from the Educational Research Institute.

The first meeting of debate group 3 took place on February 7, 2012 at the “Dialogue” Centre for Social Partnership in Warsaw. The issues discussed included the proposed solutions for the methods of awarding qualifications, recognising and confirming qualifications (including the meaning of the concept of validation, used here interchangeably with the term “confirmation”), as well as ensuring the quality of qualifications offered by the non-formal training system.

Piotr Stronkowski (Coffey International Development Ltd.) presented the results of the final report on the “Study of the procedures used to validate learning outcomes attained through non-formal education and informal learning”. The study subjects included 10 institutions operating in Poland that validate the competences of persons who acquired them in non-formal courses and training workshops or informally – in the workplace and everyday life. The validation procedures used in France, Germany, the Netherlands and the Czech Republic were also analysed. These countries all have different validation systems, integrated to varying degrees with their national qualifications frameworks. The development of ways to validate learning outcomes attained outside of the formal system is needed everywhere. The basic conclusion of the study can be summarised by stating that an effective system is needed in Poland to validate competences, including the systematisation of the procedures, as well as ensuring the quality and reliability of specific solutions.

There is no coherent system of validating competences in Poland, but a number practices and initiatives function. Some of them are regulated by the state in the form of laws and regulations (i.e. qualifying examinations or exams conducted by associations of the craft trades), while others are initiated at the grassroots level. However, the offers to validate competences available to date do not fully meet the needs of the labour market. The study showed that all respondents pay particular attention to, among other things, confirming skills associated with the use of attained knowledge in practice. The need was expressed to involve practitioners in both preparing the exam procedures, as well as in actually conducting exams.

During the debate, the phrase “at the junction with practice, we found that the Emperor was wearing no clothes” was used and participants deliberated on the fact that practice seems to be the weakest link in the process of learning and validating competences. Dr. Tomasz Saryusz-Wolski from Łódź University of Technology, for example, argued that the Polish education system is based on theoretical knowledge absorbed by memorisation and not on practical knowledge. As he stated, it is easier to transmit and check theoretical knowledge – it is easier to teach theory than practice, because in such a situation, the professor does not have to be a practitioner. The Polish Qualifications Framework emphasises practical skills, which raises the resistance of the academic community. The PQF requires changing from a system of teaching to a system of learning, and places the emphasis on the practical outcomes of education. Schools and higher education institutions should primarily teach how to acquire knowledge.

In the second part of the debate, Dr. Magdalena Dybaś (NQF project analyst) presented the preliminary results of the study “The quality assurance of qualifications awarded outside of the formal education system – an analysis of the current status from the perspective of developing the national qualifications system”. The results presented related only to a portion of the institutions that participated in the

survey, i.e. ten training institutions of the several hundred associated in the Polish Chamber of Training Companies. The main objective of the study was to diagnose the procedures used for the quality assurance of qualifications attained through a variety of courses and training workshops. What emerges is a mixed picture of the training market, as well as an ambiguous definition of the quality of such services. Generally speaking, quality in the training market is often equated with customer satisfaction (the “customer” may not necessarily be the training participants), while the manner of ensuring quality and its scope are often adapted to the requirements of the customer. Dr. Dybaś argued that customer satisfaction should not be the sole assessment criterion, as certain standards are also important. Otherwise, a training could be highly assessed because the soup served at lunch was very good. Training firms are also aware of this, but due to the expense of instituting quality assurance mechanisms, they often must respond to the expectations of clients.

It is good then that other perceptions are appearing in the market on quality – references are being made to standards, the need to adhere to minimum ones at least. There are also attempts being made to promote quality of the highest level and relate this to good practices. An example that emerged during discussions may be the Kraków Voivodeship Labour Office, which developed their own standards (and use them) – the Małopolska standards of education and training services. Solutions are also being prepared by the Polish Chamber of Training Companies.

Preliminary study results indicate that the reason relatively few training companies have formal mechanisms of quality assurance may be due to the fact that they are a significant financial and organisational burden, which do not bring measurable benefits. Firms complain about the burdensome procedures of attaining quality assurance mechanisms and their cost.

Another finding of the study is certain – there are no common, harmonised standards and guidelines for assessing training programs and allowing them to be offered. As a result, debate participants presented a postulate to develop advice and consultations in this area.

The preliminary recommendations presented by Dr. Dybaś, however, do not provide conclusive solutions but rather suggestions to be considered by those interested in this issue. She suggested that:

- It is worth developing integrated guidelines for the quality assurance of training programmes and training institutions.
- A public institution should be established to accredit training companies and conduct validation as well as set standards for the profession of trainer.

But a question arises – what should be accredited, the procedures and outcomes of the activities undertaken by training and validating institutions, or their internal systems of quality assurance? Should accreditation be the result of an inspection or an audit?

Recommendations, even in this initial version, provoked controversy. The representative of the Polish Chamber of Training Companies was surprised by the proposal that some central institution would accredit training institutions. In his opinion, there is a basic contradiction between ensuring the quality of training services and meeting customer needs, but the industry is searching for solutions that will actually shape, civilise and provide the market with greater maturity.

7.1. Proposals of institutional solutions

The topic of the meeting held on March 20, 2012 was the status of the proposed institutional arrangements associated with the implementation of new tasks required for the national qualifications system. These proposals constituted the further development of the premises set forth in the document “Initial proposal of an institution for the national qualifications system” adopted by a resolution in August 2011 by the Inter-ministerial Team for Lifelong Learning, including the National Qualifications Framework. The participants received this material for discussion.

In the first part of the meeting Elżbieta Lechowicz, referring to the principles of an integrated national qualifications system, which will be based on Polish Qualifications Framework, presented proposals on the following issues in a presentation introducing the discussion:

- the basic institutional tasks of the qualifications system,
- the scope of cooperation with NQS stakeholders, the functions and principles of operating the national qualifications register, collecting and sharing information about Polish qualifications.

In the second part of the meeting, which took place in the form of a workshop, debate participants were asked to work in small groups on the following issues:

- proposed solutions for the functioning of the teams working on qualifications issues, including the principles of appointing team members, their composition, main tasks, scope of authority and the eventual role of independent experts invited to work with the teams,
- roles and responsibilities of stakeholders in cooperating with the institution responsible for the national qualifications system in order to effectively implement the new systemic solutions in their sectors,
- criteria for stakeholder representation.

During the discussion, debate participants expressed their opinions and suggestions on various solutions. It was established that written comments should be submitted by the end of March 2012. Comments and proposals made by debate participants directly during the discussions, as well as those submitted in writing, were analysed by the project team.

7.2. Summary of the group discussion

An important conclusion from the discussion was that there are presently no consistent solutions in the field of validation and quality assurance, which constitute tools for building the credibility of qualifications and the entire system, and thus stakeholders' confidence in the system. The integrated qualifications system developed in Poland must be credible. It is therefore necessary to ensure the quality of qualifications, regardless of the paths leading to certification. In this context, a coherent validation system is needed that will allow the confirmation of learning outcomes acquired outside of the formal system according to quality assurance principles. The quality of validation will influence the quality of the awarded qualification. The source of this way of thinking is the defined understanding of the term *quality of qualifications*, which in everyday language is understood differently. Therefore, the factors ensuring reliability and the quality assurance of qualifications had to be defined – this is the starting point for further work on developing the common principles and guidelines in building a reliable qualifications system.

The work should use the findings of the research and debate, as well as the experiences and examples of good practice that were discussed at the meetings. The solutions developed should be flexible on one hand, usable by different institutions and with different qualifications, while on the other hand, they should guarantee the high quality of qualifications. Their goal is not only control, but above all to build a culture of quality, confidence in the system and increase its transparency.

In the context of institutional solutions, which are the basis for a consistent and transparent national qualifications system, further work will concentrate first on tasks directly related to operating the Integrated Qualifications Register and other activities closely associated with this resulting from the premises for an integrated NQS. The opinions and positions expressed in the course of the debate should be taken into account in further work on the project.

During the discussion, it was postulated that the initial assumptions for the legal framework of the NQS be the subject of public debate with stakeholders. A postulate was also made to involve stakeholders, considering their experiences and ability to cooperate, in future systemic solutions.

Part 8. Joint meeting of the discussion groups of the debate

Subsequent debate meetings conducted in May 2012 included all participants without divisions into groups, except for the meeting of May 25, 2012, which was held for two groups.

8.1. Meeting with international experts

On May 7–8, 2012, a seminar was held on preparing the Polish referencing report at the Warsaw Copernicus Conference Centre. The meeting was attended by Polish and international experts (from Scotland, Austria, Germany and Hungary), who shared information with IBE specialists on the extent qualifications frameworks are prepared in their countries.

On the first day, the main topic of the meeting was the presentation made by Dr. Stanisław Sławiński, NQS project expert, of the descriptors for levels 6–8 of the Polish Qualifications Framework. Participants pointed out that in their opinion, there is too much detailed information in the descriptors, while at the same time, certain general statements are overused, making it difficult to precisely define such terms as, for example, “basic”, “simple” or “routine”. Dr. Sławiński replied that the descriptor table is an attempt to organise certain concepts, among other ways, by the consistent use of language, where certain terms should be more precisely defined. At the same time, he recalled initial attempts to systematise existing diplomas to the qualifications framework. Such attempts are undertaken to develop the logical procedures, which will help in using the framework.

On the second day of the seminar, NQS project expert Horacy Dębowski presented the status of the work on entering specific qualifications into the Integrated Qualifications Register. Then, the international experts talked about introducing qualifications frameworks in their countries. The Scottish framework, functioning for 10 years, was presented by the director of that project, Aileen Ponton. Next, Eduard Staudecker spoke about preparing for the introduction of qualifications frameworks in Austria and the term of the defence of the Austrian referencing report. From his presentation, participants learned that the Austrians developed the framework three years ago and then referenced it to the European Qualifications Framework. The last speaker was Michael Schopf from Germany, who informed participants that work on the qualifications framework in his country is still ongoing, with discussions being conducted on assigning diplomas to specific levels.

8.2. Work on the qualifications register

The meeting of debate group 2 of May 25, 2012 took place at the “Dialogue” Centre for Social Partnership in Warsaw. Led by Horacy Dębowski and Marek Kopyt, discussions focused mainly on solutions for entering qualifications into the Integrated Qualification Register.

During the meeting, among other things discussed was the state of work on the qualifications register. Information collected in the register was divided into three categories, presented in tabular form: information regarding the qualifications, the entities submitting qualifications for entry into the register and entities validating the competences of a given qualification.

Discussion of the presented sets of information focused on such factors as:

- The code of a qualification – according to previously determined premises, qualifications listed in the register will be given a unique code that will not only identify the qualification, but also include basic information about it, such as its PQF level.
- The entity submitting a qualification for entry into the register – debate participants noted that it is not always clear which type of entity is able to do this. This is especially relevant in situations when an entity with validating competency is not the same as the entity awarding the qualification (as in the case of a driver’s license). A question was raised about whether the *matura* certificate will be submitted by the Ministry of National Education or the Central Examination

Board. Questions also arose about which entity should submit qualifications to the register for vocational school occupations that are attained in the craft system.

- Ownership of qualifications – one of the premises of the qualifications system is to limit the monopoly of ownership of qualifications, that is, to enable competences to be validated by many entities under the condition that they fulfil the defined requirements. Debate participants stressed that the aim of such a solution is to increase access to qualifications. Moreover, competition between entities offering training services can increase the quality of education. It was also noted that “the owner of learning outcomes is the most important element of the quality of the system”. It was agreed that the issue of qualifications’ ownership requires further discussion.
- Keywords to help find qualifications in the register – meeting participants proposed that the classification of areas of learning be used (among others, the one used by the Central Statistical Office) to create keyword lists. It was argued that learning outcomes are used in this classification and that it is very flexible (for example, it enables the recognition of qualifications from newly created fields or qualifications containing a narrow range of learning outcomes).
- Updating qualifications register entries – it is assumed that a qualification’s entry into the register will be for a limited time, even in the case of qualifications awarded for an indefinite period and those required by law to be entered into the register. This will ensure that the register will contain the most current information about a qualification.
- Accreditation of validating entities – it was deemed that the competences confirmed by a qualification that is entered into the register will be validated by an accredited entity. Accreditation procedures are the topic of discussion of the third public debate group.
- The procedures for entering qualifications into the register – participants suggested that the developed procedures include a requirement that the applicant verify whether or not the submitted qualification or a similar one is not already entered into the register.

In the next part of the meeting, Marek Kopyt presented an initial concept of the qualifications register and a description of its functions, as well as the concept and principles of the institution operating the register.

It was agreed that observations or comments to the information presented to participants be submitted to the team in writing or provided at the next debate meeting.

8.3. Discussion about the quality of qualifications

The third thematic group of the debate also met on May 25, 2012 at the “Dialogue” Centre to discuss the institutional assumptions of the national qualifications system, validation principles and quality assurance.

The meeting was led Elżbieta Lechowicz and Katarzyna Trawińska-Konador of IBE. Its main theme was the quality assurance of qualifications. Katarzyna Trawińska-Konador presented the activities undertaken in the project on the quality assurance of qualifications and their results as they related to the conclusions of the first phase of the debate. She also reported on the appointment of a group to work on the quality assurance of qualifications. This group consists of specialists from different fields (higher education, vocational education, training companies, entrepreneurs). The purpose of their meetings is for project staff to consult the results of their work on developing the principles for the quality assurance of qualifications with the specialists.

Katarzyna Trawińska-Konador presented the aims of activities performed:

- to indicate the status and basis (aspects of) of the quality of qualifications in the national qualifications system,
- to identify the potential threats to the quality of qualifications in specific areas,
- to propose methods for the quality assurance of qualifications in all areas,
- to identify and evaluate existing solutions.

In a presentation entitled “An introduction to the issue of the quality of qualifications”, Dr. Magdalena Dybaś then presented a diagram of the dimensions of the quality assurance of qualifications. During the discussion, doubts emerged about whether the term *awarded qualification* is correct. It was proposed to replace this with the term *confirmed qualification*. Participants requested clarification of the relationship between a standard and a description of a qualification. Dr. Tomasz Saryusz-Wolski noted that the standard must be included in the description. It is not known yet whether it will be the entire description or only one of its parts.

A proposal was made not to use the term *quality of qualifications* presented in the diagram, because the term suggests that the quality of the qualification itself will be assessed. It was explained that this does not relate to the process of valuing qualifications and categorising them into better or worse qualifications, but in fulfilling specified criteria. An idea emerged to replace the term *well-written qualification* with the phrase *qualification described according to distinct/defined standards and requirements* (an important principle in describing qualifications is to include the use of operational verbs).

Participants stressed the need to develop a transparent, unified and unambiguous standard, which applies to all types of qualifications, irrespective of the way of they are attained. Dr. Tomasz Saryusz-Wolski announced that a template of the description of a qualification will be prepared, the basic premise of which is that it will be common to all qualifications, but the details of the description will be tailored to the nature of the specific qualification.

Debate participants asked whether other proposals of describing occupational competences (e.g. those prepared by the Institute for Sustainable Technologies in Radom) are being taken into consideration in the NQS project work. Dr. Agnieszka Chłoń-Domińczak assured participants that the NQS team is careful to consider the consistency of solutions developed in the NQS project with those emerging from other projects. Attention was also turned to the problem of measuring specific factors influencing a qualification’s quality. It was proposed to define the criteria of the description of a qualification in detail, as its proper construction will prevent the entry of several similar qualifications into the register.

Participants suggested that qualifications be described in a manner that takes into consideration the descriptions of European qualifications. Dr. Agnieszka Chłoń-Domińczak explained that qualifications are relevant to a given country. The NQS team takes international solutions into account in working on the principles for describing qualifications, but the qualifications system must be adapted to the solutions existing in Poland.

Debate participants requested clarification about who will be describing the qualifications and who will be entering qualifications into the register. Dr. Agnieszka Chłoń-Domińczak explained that qualifications will be described by the entity submitting it for entry into the register, that is, the administrator of the qualification. The entity operating the register will be responsible for entering qualifications. The register will include information on institutions which will have the right to award a given qualification. It will not be possible to enter two identical qualifications, as they will differ in their learning outcomes. During the discussion, voices were raised that the right to submit new qualifications to the register should be limited to only a few institutions representative of a given sector. Some debate participants stated, however, that narrowing the list of entities able to submit qualifications is dangerous, as it could inhibit the dynamic of change in the qualifications market.

During the discussion on the quality of validation, participants proposed that the phrase *criteria/requirements ensuring the quality of validation* be used, according to the earlier changes. It was noted that the present scheme does not include career counselling, which can occur not only before attaining a qualification, but also afterwards. Some participants noted, however, that career counselling is not part of validation, because not everyone needs to enlist the help of a professional counsellor. Since the meeting of group 3 on the Integrated Qualifications Register was held at the same time as the second group’s meeting, participants requested that the material from that meeting be sent to them.

8.4. The Polish Qualifications Framework as a tool to modernise the national qualifications system

After the summer break, the next meeting of the public debate was held on October 23, 2012, at Warsaw's Copernicus Conference Centre. It was devoted to the modernisation of the national qualifications system, especially the Polish Qualifications Framework, which is a key element of this system. The discussion was attended by over 70 individuals, among them representatives of public institutions working in education, employers' organisations, trade unions, non-governmental organisations, research institutions and consulting firms.

Dr. Agnieszka Chłoń-Domińczak, NQS project leader, began the event by presenting the results of the work carried out since the previous meeting of May 25 on the national qualifications system and its specific components. She discussed the results of cooperation with stakeholder representatives in the work on the proposed principles of the quality assurance of qualifications and assigning qualifications to levels in the national framework.

Most of the discussion was devoted to the opinions of the debate participant about the draft referencing report – a document with the primary aim of showing how the PQF is referenced to the European Qualifications Framework. It was agreed that the comments received will be included in further work on this document. To a greater extent than before, the report presents the significance of non-formal education and the role of the craft trades in vocational education. Debate participants expressed the opinion that there is insufficient information on the national framework and other elements of the modernised qualifications system in the Polish media.

During the meeting, debate participants also proposed a new, additional solution conducive to cooperation – an online tool for discussions. This internet system of conducting public consultations, providing the ability to, among other things, discuss documents being produced by the project, is available at <http://skso.ibe.edu.pl>.

A public debate meeting was held on December 10, 2012 to present, among others, progress in the work on developing the principles for assigning PQF levels to qualifications. This work was carried out in two stages by teams of stakeholder representatives. In the first stage, completed in September 2012, a proposal was developed of methods determining the levels of qualifications. In the second stage, this method was verified by making a preliminary determination of levels for 350 qualifications.

At the meeting of December 10, 2012, Elżbieta Lechowicz and Marek Kopyt of IBE presented on qualifications in the modernised national qualifications system and specified the functions of the Integrated Qualification Register. The current proposal for the template of describing qualifications was discussed, including the changes resulting from the last discussion on this topic in the public debate. Also highlighted was the compatibility of the proposed qualifications' description template developed in the NQF project with other classifications (among others, the ESCO taxonomy – European Skills Competences and Occupations).

8.5. The quality assurance of qualifications

The next meeting of the second cycle of the public debate, held on March 12, 2013 at Warsaw's Copernicus Conference Centre, was devoted to the quality assurance of qualifications. The discussion was led by Dr. Agnieszka Chłoń-Domińczak, while Dr. Ewa Bacia and Dr. Magdalena Dybaś presented the work carried out on this topic. Dr. Ewa Bacia began the seminar with a presentation on the principles of ensuring the quality of qualifications. The general principles, discussed at earlier meetings, were provided with more detail and clarified, and were related to the institutions that are to function in the integrated national qualifications system. These institutions include the qualifications register, educational and training institutions, validating and awarding bodies, institutions providing external quality assurance, and entities submitting qualifications to be entered into the register.

At the time of the previous meeting, principles were also defined on the relationship between institutions and the principles of ensuring the quality of the validation process. Possible ways of verifying the functioning of these institutions and potential sources of information on this subject were also indicated.

The second presentation, entitled “Referencing selected principles of qualifications’ quality assurance to the currently used solutions in Poland and internationally” was made by Dr. Magdalena Dybaś. She compared the project’s principles for qualifications’ quality assurance with European guidelines, solutions used in the UK, as well as Polish solutions, among them the certificates in the field of information technology and qualifying standards in Polish banking. This presentation had several aims. First, it presented various ways of ensuring the quality of qualifications. Second, it described the similarities and differences between Polish and international approaches, and third, it demonstrated the various ways of formulating and implementing these principles in different contexts.

Debate participants also were presented a summary of the work undertaken by the NQS team and future plans for establishing the principles of the quality assurance of qualifications. This was the third presentation, discussed jointly by Dr. Ewa Bacia and Dr. Magdalena Dybaś. Participants learned that a pilot is planned to implement the principles developed. The meeting ended with a discussion in which several persons stated that further work on the Polish solutions should be related to the European guidelines on quality standards in lifelong learning. The possibility of using the institutional diagram presented and principles of quality assurance in various contexts, such as higher education, formal general and vocational education and non-formal education were also discussed.

It was emphasised that over-regulation should be avoided in the development and implementation of a quality assurance system – the system cannot be based only on control and oversight; it is essential to support all institutions and entities involved in the quality assurance of qualifications. The research, consultations and social debate serve, among others, to identify good practices in the area of quality assurance. Ensuring the quality of qualifications is a great challenge for the system being developed. To meet this challenge, it is essential to cooperate with the communities and institutions involved, from all sectors – public, private and social, first at the stage of developing the principles, and then in their implementation.

Part 9. Summary of the second stage of the debate

The second stage of public debate enabled stakeholders to discuss a number of key elements relevant to the national qualifications system, including:

- second stage generic descriptors and sectoral qualifications frameworks,
- proposals for the principles of assigning PQF levels to qualifications,
- issues related to the ownership of qualifications,
- credit transfer and accumulation,
- principles of entering qualifications into the register,
- quality assurance of qualifications,
- premises of the national qualifications system,
- participation of stakeholders in the NQS.

An important result of the debate was also to establish valuable contacts with representatives of stakeholder groups and invite them to develop the specific results of the NQS project together with staff and experts of the Educational Research Institute. Participants in the debate on the Polish Qualifications Framework contributed, among others, to developing the proposed principles for assigning PQF levels to qualifications and the principles of defining the amount of work required to attain the learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and social competence) required of qualifications. This report also summarises the work of the second stage of the debate. It must be noted, however, that discussions on developing a new qualifications system and work on the Polish Qualifications Framework will continue. Subsequent solutions will certainly be consulted with stakeholders. Debate participants will receive information on the activities undertaken in the project and their results, enabling the developing solutions to be verified in an ongoing manner in terms of the needs and capabilities of stakeholders.

Appendices

1. Qualifications standards in Polish banking: the Polish Bank Association
2. The European Qualifications Framework for the financial services sector
3. The Trans-VAE Project on validating competences acquired informally and non-formally in the personal care sector: Bydgoszcz Vocational Training Centre
4. Certification of ICT skills: the Polish Information Processing Society
5. Validating occupational qualifications attained through non-formal education and informal learning in the construction trades: the Confederation of Construction and Real Estate
6. Validation in the craft industries as an example of good practice: the Polish Craft Association
7. List of institutions and organisations participating in the debate
8. Timetable of the first stage of the debate
9. Timetable of the second stage of the debate
10. Evaluation questionnaire results of the public debate participants

Appendix 1. Qualifications standards in Polish banking: the Polish Bank Association

An important addition to the debate on the requirements to be entered into the PQF was presented by a representative of the Polish Bank Association on qualifying standards in the Polish banking sector. The standards have been in force since 1996, with work underway for the past year on a new version (related to the EQF). Qualification standards describe the knowledge and skills required of bank employees from the lowest to the highest position, regardless of size, activity profile, scope of the bank's activities, as well as other financial institutions working with the banks. The Standards System divides these requirements into levels that respectively correspond to occupational grades:

- Independent Bank Employee,
- Certified Bank Employee,
- Banking Specialist in a chosen specialty,
- Bank Expert and Manager (with a separate qualification procedure).

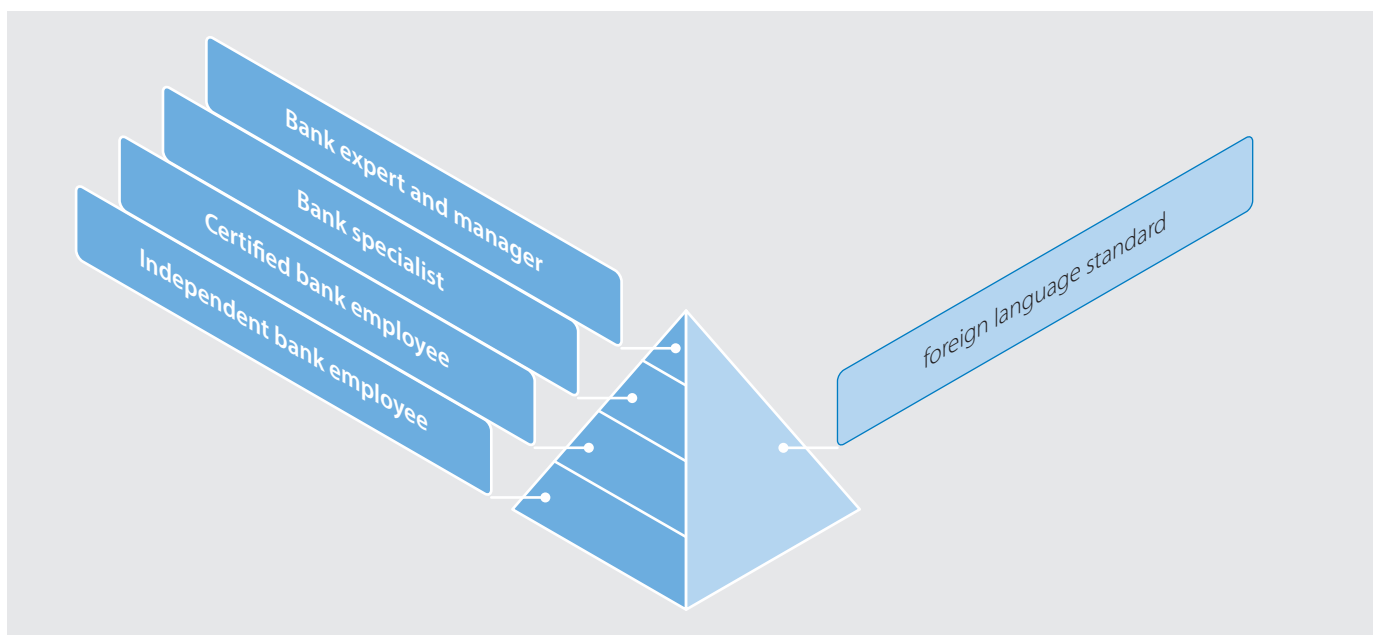
The requirements for specific professional levels include the following areas: general banking knowledge and/or specialized knowledge, skills, desirable psychological predispositions. At each level there are specific training requirements for foreign language proficiency.

The Polish Bank Association has signed cooperative agreements with training institutions complying with the Standards System. There are currently 13 schools in the System that prepare persons for examinations in banking and one school preparing persons for specialized foreign language requirements.

The stages of applying for professional levels include:

1. Completing appropriate training and passing the examination before a PBA appointed commission or passing the examination through an external process.
2. Demonstrating relevant work experience in a bank or financial institution.
3. Applying to have the professional level awarded.
4. Having the application approved by the secretariat of the PBA Standards System.
5. Achieving the PBA professional level and receiving the certificate at a ceremony.

Figure 4.



According to the PBA's assessment, this system brings many benefits. For the banks and financial institutions working with banks, the Standards System is:

- a certification system objectively confirming the level of knowledge and skills,
- a description of requirements, which can be used for job descriptions, employee assessments and competency mapping,
- a tool to rationalise policies for salaries and promotions,
- a tool to plan the professional development of individual groups of workers and reserve staff.

For current and future bank employees, the Qualification Standards comprise a clear description of the requirements for defining and clarifying one's own professional development (career development path, speed of advancement, selection of specialisations).

Participants in courses and training workshops, conducted according to the requirements of the Qualification Standards, learn new approaches to banking, oriented towards the client and his/her needs, which is essential in providing professional banking services in the Polish and European markets.

Source: *Presentation at the debate and the PBA (www.zbp.pl)*.

Appendix 2. The European Qualifications Framework for the financial services sector

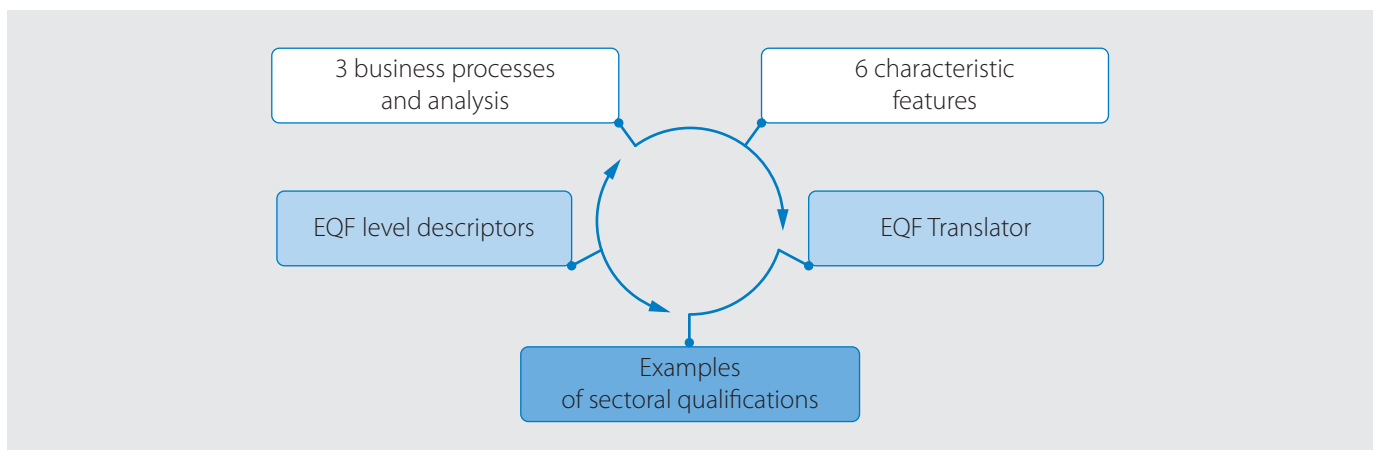
Developing the European Qualifications Framework for the financial services sector, carried out as part of the FIRST project, continues the work of leading European banking institutions federated in the European Bank Training Network (EBTN) on establishing European qualifications for this sector. The most important result of the project is the so-called EQF Translator for financial institutions, which provides descriptions of the eight universal levels of EQF qualifications translated into the language of the work environment specific to financial services. The project is an element of building high quality, transparent qualifications, which can be used by a wide range of stakeholders: employees, financial institutions, corporate training firms, certifying organisations, social partners, and ultimately – most importantly – customers.

A qualifications framework “tailor made” for the financial services sector will contribute to the promotion of the EQF in the financial sector. An additional benefit is the presentation of:

- sample, model certificates that comply well with the requirements of specific EQF levels important to the sector, including the EFCB and EFA certificates available in Poland,
- model solutions for creating new qualifications, fully compliant with the requirements of the EQF.

The first stage of work on the project was to develop a glossary characteristic of the financial services sector, which would be the foundation for developing the Translator. An analysis of existing business processes was used, according to Figure 5:

Figure 5.



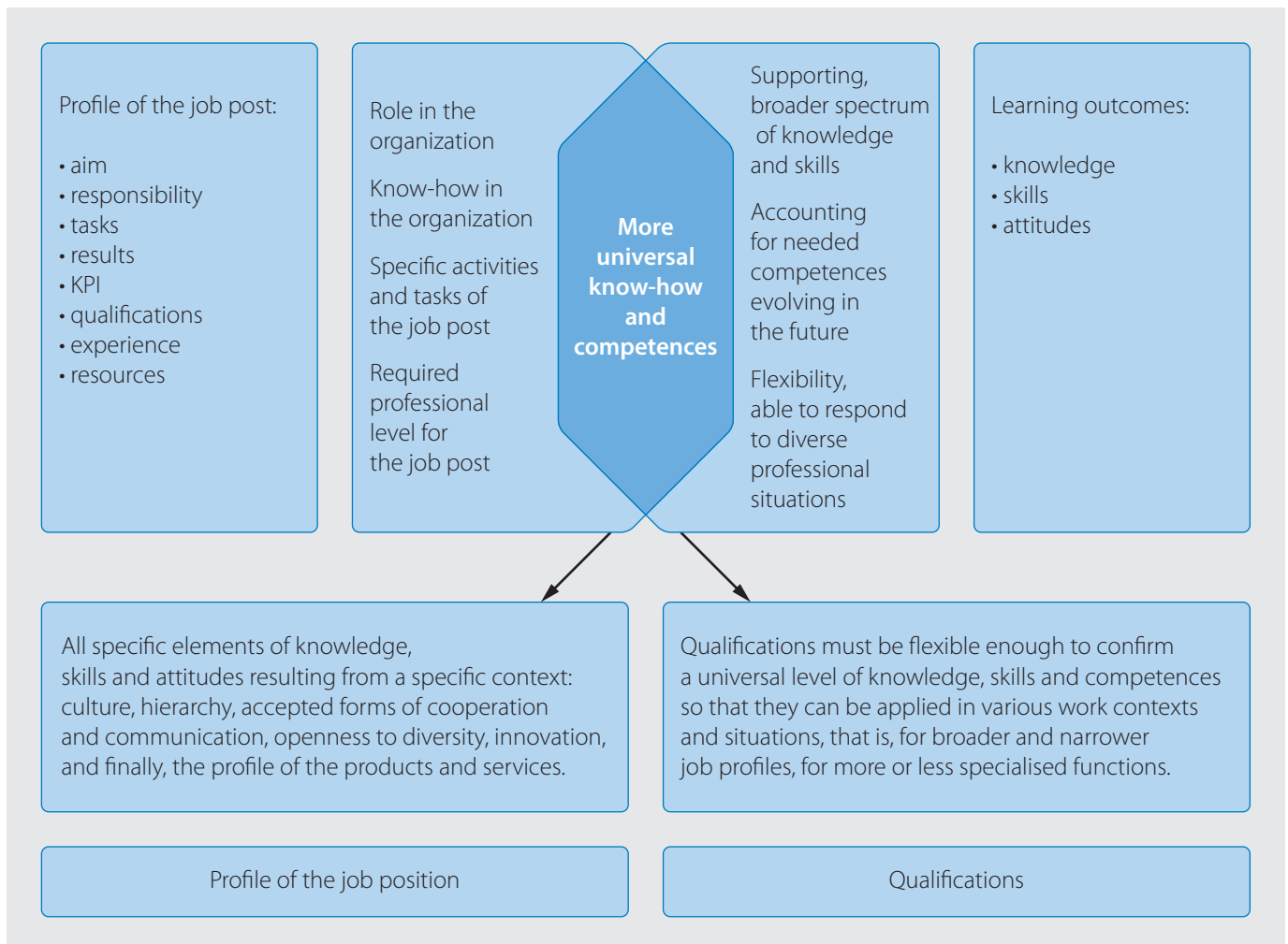
The work carried out identified six “distinctors” – key, general features that assist in distinguishing knowledge, skills and competences for the sector at different EQF levels in the fields of:

- financial markets and macroeconomics,
- financial brokerage,
- customer service,
- compliance,
- the relationship of risk to profit,
- competitiveness.

The framework for the financial services sector has been developed for levels 3–7, i.e. the levels of the qualifications most frequently obtained in the banking sector. Verbs were used in the Translator according to the Bloom / Anderson taxonomy to more clearly distinguish the required knowledge, skills and competences. The proposed provisions focused on translating the definition of the EQF levels to the specifics of the sector. They were not supplemented by new elements of a universal nature (e.g. communication skills).

The proposed descriptions of levels had to strike a balance between an appropriate level of detail to simultaneously capture the specifics of the sector and an adequate level of generalisation, so that the Translator could be useful as a tool for finding similarities, making comparisons and organising various qualifications important to the sector. The descriptions do not include all possible learning outcomes that can be found in the financial services industry qualifications, but those that are the determinants of a given level. It is important that the developed solution enables a qualification to be positioned, as opposed to a particular job post or the competences of individuals (see Fig. 6).

Figure 6.



The more qualifications are based on competences, the more they have a modular character and can be adapted to different work environments, the greater will be the similarity between job positions and qualification degrees or certificates, as well as the ability to assign them to the appropriate level in the relevant national qualifications framework.

According to Prof. Ewa Chmielecka, an expert in the field of EQF and PQF and the Polish representative in the European Commission's EQF Advisory Group, "The prepared sectoral frameworks are a very valuable contribution to the sectoral interpretation of the qualifications frameworks, and I believe that they will be very happily used in the second stage of the NQF implementation project in Poland (...) Your Translator is a very good example of how the frameworks can move into the realm of sectoral requirements for qualifications."

Source: WIB Presentation (www.wib.org.pl).

Appendix 3. The Trans-VAE Project on validating competences acquired informally and non-formally in the personal care sector: Bydgoszcz Vocational Training Centre

The Trans-VAE Project was implemented from October 1, 2009 to December 31, 2011 as part of “Lifelong Learning” in the Leonardo Da Vinci Programme, in cooperation with six partners from five countries: Germany (CJD Maximiliansau and Heureka.net), France (GIP FCIP Alsace), Spain (CPDE), Switzerland (Swiss Occidental Leonardo) and Poland (Zakład Doskonalenia Zawodowego of Bydgoszcz). TRANS-VAE is an experimental process of validating learning outcomes acquired through non-formal education and informal learning by persons employed or seeking employment in the personal care sector in the following occupations:

- Personal assistant for disabled persons,
- Home care provider,
- Home child care provider,
- Institutional child care provider,
- Community home care provider,
- Care provider in residential care institutions.

The aim of the project is to transfer to Poland the methods developed in France of validating learning outcomes acquired through experience. The French partner, who is also the project coordinator, is sharing experiences. The main objective of the initiative is to increase the employment of beneficiaries by formally recognizing their competences.

The VAE process creates a path of validating competences acquired through experience. It is a path of transition from work experience to self-awareness about one’s competences and an assessment of work experiences, and then to the confirmation and attainment of qualifications that can be used in professional life.

A person intending to undergo the process of assessing learning outcomes acquired through experience is required to demonstrate that s/he has been attaining the competences to be confirmed for at least three years. There are no requirements related to age or documented employment history – the process is focused exclusively on the experience and competences, which can be obtained through different contexts in life and work. A person who wants to have his/her competences validated begins a three-stage assessment process. The first step is to complete an application form, which enables a commission to determine whether the candidate meets the prerequisites. If a candidate meets these conditions, the next step is the completion of a questionnaire describing selected elements of the experience which are considered sufficient to attain the appropriate qualification.

In practice, the examinee is often unable to complete the questionnaire independently. An advisor helps the candidate become aware of his/her competences and to transfer them onto paper. The final stage of the validation process is an interview before an examination board. During the exam, the board asks questions about the activities and experience described in the questionnaire. By comparing the information provided by the candidate orally and in writing with a description of the profession based on the qualification’s professional standards, the board makes the decision to grant a certificate acknowledging full or partial qualifications. The board may also decide not to grant any qualifications.

In France, nearly nine years after its introduction, the VAE process is now fully integrated with the education and continuing education systems. VAE works as a supplement to formal methods of certifying qualifications. About 25,000 diplomas are issued annually, and the increase in the number of applicants is about 10% per year.

In concluding his presentation, the speaker shared his reflection that for the VAE system to be successfully implemented in the countries participating in the project, they must create or develop procedures and the infrastructure elements to enable competences acquired through experiences to be assessed. This includes, above all, a transparent description of professional activities

(list of skills and social competences), the tools prepared for the candidates (questionnaires, additional documentation), an information campaign about the opportunity to achieve qualifications through this path and the benefits of going through the assessment process, as well as the proper training of advisors and members of the examination board.

Source: *presentation by the Bydgoszcz Vocational Training Centre.*

Appendix 4. Certification of ICT skills: the Polish Information Processing Society

The Polish Information Processing Society, founded in 1981, is a member of CEPIS (Council of European Professional Informatics Societies – European Information Association). One of its most important statutory objectives is to promote the field of information and communications technology (ICT) and its applications in society.

Due to the lack of a formal system to assess ICT skills in Poland, PTI undertook an initiative to classify and clarify this field. As a result of this work, PTI has become an awarding body of the certification system based on the CEPIS license – the issuing of certificates to information technology users, professionals and specialists.

In his presentation, the PTI representative discussed in detail the types of certificates issued by the aforementioned institution. Any user of information technology can apply for an ECDL (European Computer Driving License) certificate, regardless of age, employment status, the producer of hardware and software used for private and/or business use. This certificate attests that the holder is able to properly operate basic tasks on a personal computer, such as word processing, using a spreadsheet or a computer network. Seven exams assess these skills, one theoretical and six practical. These exams verify the basic skills required for both work and more often in the daily life of every citizen. Office programs also include an advanced level. Additionally, ECDL introduced certificates attesting to skills in specialised applications (among others GIS, CAD, graphics, web design). PTI offers a second type of certificate – the EUCIP, a certifying program in computer science that has many various, specialised competency modules. Students, IT specialists as well as professionals from other sectors can take such exams to obtain certification of their ICT competences. The EUCIP certification system refers to an assessment of two areas of knowledge. The first level, the *Core Level Certificate*, focuses primarily on fundamental theoretical knowledge of most IT specialisations. The next levels, *Professional* and *Administrator*, known as *Elective Level Certificates*, are designated for persons with more or less extensive practical knowledge in a specific area of ICT. The base level is the first stage that must be achieved by a candidate who wants to apply for a specialised-level certificate. Fulfilling this CEPIS requirement guarantees that a candidate has developed his/her practical skills on a solid foundation of theoretical knowledge.

An important element in the certification activities of PTI is to ensure the quality of both the teaching process and validation procedures. Certification throughout Europe follows the same established principles and procedures. Candidates who apply for certification use uniform and publicly open syllabi describing the learning outcomes. All training materials are accredited. The reliability of the validation process is guaranteed by separating the training and examination processes. All the centres conducting the ECDL and EUCIP exams must be accredited by the Polish Information Processing Society. By following the same quality assurance mechanisms throughout the world, EUCIP and ECDL certificates are recognised and respected internationally.

Source: presentation of the Polish Information Processing Society.

Appendix 5. Validating occupational qualifications attained through non-formal education and informal learning in the construction trades: the Confederation of Construction and Real Estate

The representative of the Confederation of Construction and Real Estate presented the principles of how the PN-EN ISO/ICE 17024: 2004 norms function and described the requirements for certifying bodies, whose task is to validate vocational competences acquired by individuals in the non-formal education system and as the result of informal learning.¹³

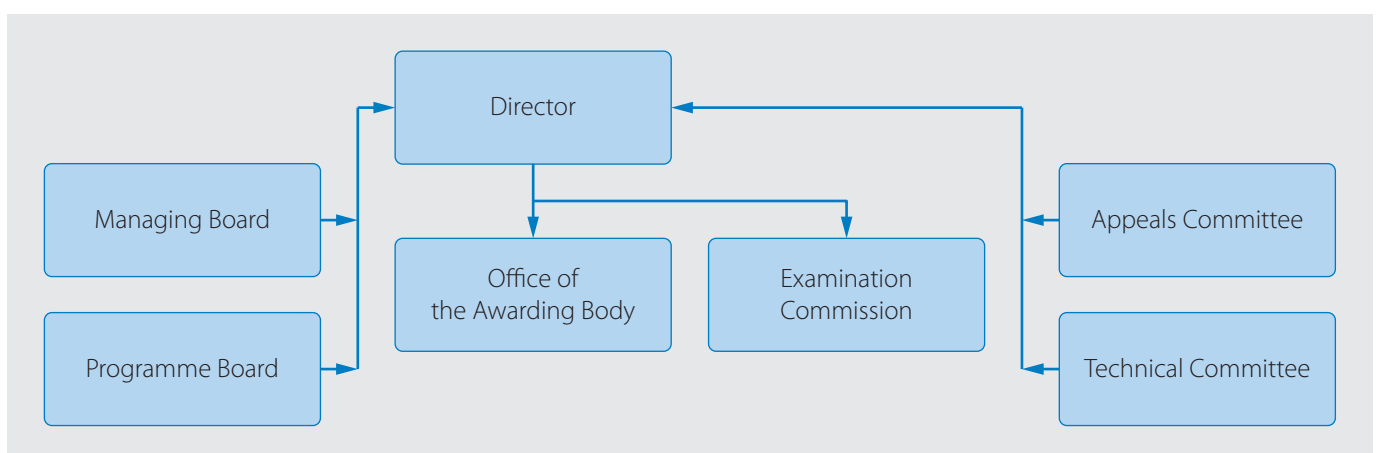
This norm has been applied in the APL-BUD “Recognition of vocational qualifications in the Polish construction sector, acquired during the work process” Project (No. 2008-1-1PL1 EO05-02072), implemented within the framework of the Leonardo da Vinci Programme. As part of the project, a pilot examination was conducted for persons with skills acquired while working as bricklayers, roofers and installers of equipment and sanitary systems. Additionally, partial qualifications were distinguished for each of these occupations.

Tasks were very clearly divided in the project. The task of preparing the pilot examination for the APL-Bud project was the responsibility of two entities: the Confederation of Construction and Real Estate – CCRE and the “Budowlani” Trade Union – BTU, who worked together on this with the National Centre for Supporting Vocational and Continuing Education (NCFSVCE) and the Centre for Research and Development, “Education and Work”. The Board of Education in Gdańsk supervised the preparation and implementation of the examination. ZETOM – CERT Sp. z o.o. (an institution accredited by the Polish Centre for Accreditation), as an entity independent of the schools and training institutions, conducted the examinations and issued certificates.

According to the procedure and requirements of PN-EN ISO/ICE 17024:2004 “Assessment of conformity. General requirements for entities certifying persons”, an external examination was given. Passing this examination did not confer an occupational title according to the regulations of the Minister of Education and Science of 3 February 2006 on the acquisition and supplementation of general knowledge, skills and vocational qualifications in extracurricular forms. The examination was for a qualification, whereas the regulations govern the examination process for a particular occupation and require that the vocational school submit a request to the Board of Education to establish an examination board.

Based on the practical example under discussion, an organisational diagram was presented of the certifying entity.

Figure 7. Organisational chart of an awarding body



¹³ It is worth noting that this is a significant issue in the construction industry, as the need to confirm competences acquired outside of the formal educational system exists for 102 of 141 construction occupations.

In the discussion that ensued after the presentation of the Confederation of Construction and Real Estate, it was noted that construction occupations entail a great degree of responsibility, and thus strict standards and a high quality validation process are extremely important. Competences attained through non-formal education and informal learning must be shown to be equivalent to those acquired through the formal education system in order to make it possible to award a qualification in the construction trades. Because of the great responsibility associated with occupations in the construction industry, construction qualifications should be renewed at set time intervals to demonstrate, for example, the attainment of knowledge in new technologies developed in the construction industry since the qualification was initially awarded. The system of license renewals is common in Europe and the world and, although it is expensive, it should also be required in Poland.

Source: *presentation of the Confederation of Construction and Real Estate.*

Appendix 6. Validation in the craft industries as an example of good practice: the Polish Craft Association

For years, the Polish Craft Association has been validating learning outcomes acquired through non-formal education and informal learning. This validation occurs through examinations for the titles of journeyman and master. A representative of a craft chamber presented the solutions used in this area and emphasised that the best learning outcomes are achieved by attaining a qualification through various paths.

Craft chambers use uniform principles defined by the Ministry of National Education of organising and conducting examinations for journeyman and master to validate occupational qualifications. Characteristic of the examination process is its openness and accessibility to different groups of candidates regardless of their age or educational context. This means that both graduates of formal vocational educational institutions as well as persons who took courses, workshops and acquired practical experience of conducting a trade can acquire qualifications.

The state's guarantee of the validity of having achieved specific qualifications through different paths is also significant. Employers of Germany, Austria and Belgium were cited as examples, where the master's diplomas and journeyman certificates awarded by Poland's Craft Chambers are recognised because the systems are similar, a great proportion of practice is included in the learning process and it is easy to identify the qualifications in the Polish legal system. One also can easily contact the institution responsible for the validation process and awarding the qualification.

The journeyman and master examination system was presented as an example of good practice. It has a long, centuries-old tradition and applies to many trades that have changed over time. Currently, craft exams cover 115 trades, including 48 learned at schools and 67 learned outside of schools (including unique trades such as corset-maker, plaster decorator or stained glass maker). The list of trades is not closed. The scope of craft examinations is defined by the Ministry of National Education, but the standards of the requirements for master examinations and trades learned outside of schools is determined by the Polish Craft Association, using for this purpose national occupational qualifications standards, among others.

Craft chambers are required to ensure the proper procedures for conducting examinations, strictly defined for:

- appointing examination boards,
- the conditions which must be met by persons who apply to be on an examination board,
- the conditions for admitting journeyman and master candidates to an examination,
- the procedures related to applying to take the examination,
- the organisation of the examination,
- the responsibilities and tasks of the examination board members,
- the assessment of the examination results.

The legal framework for validation in the craft trades is regulated by the Act on the craft trades and regulations of the Minister of National Education, which enables three paths to be used to attain trade qualifications: formal, non-formal and informal. As an example of an informal approach, the still-functioning apprenticeship system was described, which provides opportunities for "special needs" youth to validate competences (though this is not necessarily equivalent to awarding qualifications). The discussion focused on the extent of this system's boundaries, that is, the degree to which it enables the attainment of new qualifications.

In summary, the speaker noted that one premise of the Polish Qualifications Framework is to recognise the different paths leading to specific qualifications. One of these is the validation of learning outcomes based on practice, which is the focus of the craft industries in vocational education.

Source: *presentation of the Polish Craft Association.*

Appendix 7. List of institutions and organisations participating in the debate

INSTITUTION		CATEGORY
Kancelaria Prezesa Rady Ministrów	Chancellery of the Prime Minister	government institution
Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej	Ministry of National Education	government institution
Ministerstwo Finansów	Ministry of Finance	government institution
Ministerstwo Gospodarki	Ministry of Economy	government institution
Ministerstwo Kultury i Dziedzictwa Narodowego	Ministry of Culture and National Heritage	government institution
Ministerstwo Nauki i Szkolnictwa Wyższego	Ministry of Science and Higher Education	government institution
Ministerstwo Obrony Narodowej	Ministry of National Defence	government institution
Ministerstwo Pracy i Polityki Społecznej	Ministry of Labour and Social Policy	government institution
Ministerstwo Rolnictwa i Rozwoju Wsi	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development	government institution
Ministerstwo Rozwoju Regionalnego	Ministry of Regional Development	government institution
Biuro Uznawalności Wykształcenia i Wymiany Międzynarodowej	Bureau for Academic Recognition and International Exchange	government institution
Centralna Komisja Egzaminacyjna	Central Examination Board	government institution
Główny Urząd Statystyczny	Central Statistical Office	government institution
Krajowy Ośrodek Wspierania Edukacji Zawodowej i Ustawicznej	National Centre for Supporting Vocational and Continuing Education (NCFSVCE)	government institution
Okręgowa Komisja Egzaminacyjna w Krakowie	Regional Examination Board in Kraków	government institution
Ośrodek Rozwoju Edukacji	Centre for Education Development	government institution
Państwowa Komisja Akredytacyjna	State Accreditation Committee	government institution
Polska Agencja Rozwoju Przedsiębiorczości	Polish Agency for Enterprise Development	government institution
Urząd Statystyczny w Gdańsku	Statistical Office in Gdańsk	government institution
Zakład Ubezpieczeń Społecznych	Social Insurance Institution	government institution
United Nations Development Programme	United Nations Development Programme	international institution
Urząd m.st. Warszawy	Warsaw City Hall	local government
Dolnośląski Wojewódzki Urząd Pracy	Regional Employment Agency of Lower Silesia	regional employment office
Urząd Pracy m.st. Warszawy	Warsaw Employment Agency	regional employment office
Wojewódzki Urząd Pracy w Białymstoku	Regional Employment Agency in Białystok	regional employment office
Wojewódzki Urząd Pracy w Gdańsku	Regional Employment Agency in Gdańsk	regional employment office
Wojewódzki Urząd Pracy w Krakowie	Regional Employment Agency in Kraków	regional employment office
Wojewódzki Urząd Pracy w Szczecinie	Regional Employment Agency in Szczecin	regional employment office
Wojewódzki Urząd Pracy w Toruniu	Regional Employment Agency in Toruń	regional employment office
Wydział Organizacji Urzędu i Rozwoju Kadr WUP w Olsztynie	Department of Organisational Structure and Personnel Development, Regional Employment Agency in Olsztyn	regional employment office
Komisja Krajowa NSZZ „Solidarność”	National Commission of the Solidarity Independent Self-Governing Trade Union	trade union
Ogólnopolskie Porozumienie Związków Zawodowych	All-Poland Alliance of Trade Unions (OPZZ)	trade union
Sekcja Krajowa Oświaty i Wychowania NSZZ „Solidarność”	National Branch Secretariat of Education of the Solidarity Independent Self-Governing Trade Union	trade union
Wolny Związek Zawodowy „Solidarność – Oświata”	Free Trade Union “Solidarity – Education”	trade union
Związek Nauczycielstwa Polskiego	Polish Teachers’ Union	trade union

INSTITUTION		CATEGORY
Związek Zawodowy „Budowlani”	“Budowlani” Trade Union	związki zawodowe
Konfederacja Budownictwa i Nieruchomości	Confederation of Construction and Real Estate	employers, federations and organisations
Krajowa Izba Gospodarcza	National Chamber of Commerce	employers, federations and organisations
Krajowa Izba Gospodarcza Elektroniki i Telekomunikacji	National Chamber of Electronics and Telecommunication	employers, federations and organisations
Ogólnopolska Izba Gospodarki Nieruchomościami	Polish Chamber of Real Estate Management	employers, federations and organisations
PGE Energetyka Jądrowa SA	PGE Capital Group	employers, federations and organisations
PKPP Lewiatan	Polish Confederation of Private Employers Lewiatan	employers, federations and organisations
Polskie Stowarzyszenie Producentów Dźwigów	Polish Association of Producers of Cranes	employers, federations and organisations
Polsko-Niemiecka Izba Przemysłowo-Handlowa	Polish-German Chamber of Commerce	employers, federations and organisations
Pracodawcy RP	Employers of Poland	employers, federations and organisations
Saint-Gobain Construction Products Polska Sp. z o.o.	Saint-Gobain Construction Products Poland	employers, federations and organisations
Thyssen Krupp Xervon Polska	Thyssen Krupp Xervon Poland	employers, federations and organisations
Związek Banków Polskich	Polish Bank Association	employers, federations and organisations
Związek Pracodawców Polska Miedź	Employers’ Organisation of Polska Miedź	employers, federations and organisations
Związek Rzemiosła Polskiego	Polish Craft Association	employers, federations and organisations
Federacja Stowarzyszeń Naukowo-Technicznych NOT	Polish Federation Of Engineering Associations – NOT	institutions and trade organisations
Instytut Rynku Kapitałowego – WSE Research S.A.	WSE Research S.A	institutions and trade organisations
Mediatorzy.pl	Mediators.pl	institutions and trade organisations
Polskie Stowarzyszenie Zarządzania Kadrami	Polish Human Resources Management Association	institutions and trade organisations
Polskie Stowarzyszenie Gipsu	Polish Association of Gypsum	institutions and trade organisations
Polskie Towarzystwo Informatyczne	Polish Information Processing Society	institutions and trade organisations
Stowarzyszenie Księgowych w Polsce	The Accountants Association in Poland (AAP)	institutions and trade organisations
Stowarzyszenie Trenerów Organizacji Pozarządowych	Association of Non-governmental Organisation Trainers	institutions and trade organisations
Stowarzyszenie Doradców Szkolnych i Zawodowych RP	Association of School and Vocational Advisors	institutions and trade organisations
Stowarzyszenie Elektryków Polskich (SEP)	Association of Polish Electrical Engineers SEP	institutions and trade organisations

INSTITUTION		CATEGORY
Bydgoski Zakład Doskonalenia Zawodowego	Vocational Training Centre in Bydgoszcz	schools, higher education institutions, formal education system
Centrum Edukacji Nauczycieli Szkół Artystycznych	Art School Teachers Educational Centre	schools, higher education institutions, formal education system
Konferencja Rektorów Zawodowych Szkół Polskich	Conference of Polish Vocational School Rectors	schools, higher education institutions, formal education system
Krajowa Szkoła Administracji Publicznej	Academy of Public Administration	schools, higher education institutions, formal education system
Liceum im. Stefana Batorego	Stefan Batory Upper Secondary School	schools, higher education institutions, formal education system
Łódzkie Centrum Doskonalenia Nauczycieli i Kształcenia Praktycznego	Łódź Centre for Continuing Education and Practical Training of Teachers	schools, higher education institutions, formal education system
Międzynarodowa Wyższa Szkoła Logistyki i Transportu we Wrocławiu	International University of Logistics and Transport In Wrocław	schools, higher education institutions, formal education system
Ogólnopolskie Stowarzyszenie Dyrektorów Centrów Kształcenia Ustawicznego	National Association of Directors of Continuing Education Centres	schools, higher education institutions, formal education system
Ośrodek Pedagogiki Pracy Innowacyjnej Gospodarki	Work Pedagogy of Innovative Economy Centre	schools, higher education institutions, formal education system
Politechnika Łódzka	Technical University of Lodz	schools, higher education institutions, formal education system
Politechnika Warszawska	Warsaw University of Technology	schools, higher education institutions, formal education system
Stowarzyszenie Dyrektorów Szkół Średnich	Association of Upper Secondary School Directors	schools, higher education institutions, formal education system
Szkoła Główna Handlowa	Warsaw School of Economics	schools, higher education institutions, formal education system
Uniwersytet Warszawski	University of Warsaw	schools, higher education institutions, formal education system
Uniwersytet Jagielloński	Jagiellonian University	schools, higher education institutions, formal education system
Wyższa Szkoła Gospodarowania Nieruchomościami	Higher School of Real Estate Management	schools, higher education institutions, formal education system
Związek Zakładów Doskonalenia Zawodowego	Association of Vocational Training Centres	schools, higher education institutions, formal education system
GHK Polska Sp. z o.o.	GHK Poland	think tank

INSTITUTION		CATEGORY
Instytut Badań Strukturalnych	Institute for Structural Research	think tank
Instytut Pracy i Spraw Socjalnych	Institute of Labour and Social Studies	think tank
Instytut Rozwoju Służb Społecznych	Institute for the Development of Social Services	think tank
Instytut Spraw Publicznych	Institute of Public Affairs	think tank
ITEE Radom	Institute for Sustainable Technologies in Radom	think tank
Vocational Competence Certificate (VCC)	VCC – Vocational Competence Certificate	certifying institution
ZETOM-CERT Sp. z o.o.	ZETOM-CERT	certifying institution
Carte Blanche	Carte Blanche	training firm
Centrum Badawczo-Rozwojowe „Edukacja i Praca”	Centre for Research and Development “Education and Work”	training firm
Combidata Poland Sp. z o.o.	Combidata Poland	training firm
Demos Polska Sp. z o.o.	Demos Poland	training firm
Dom Szkoleń i Doradztwa	House of Training and Consultancy	training firm
Europejski Instytut Edukacji Informatycznej	ECCC Foundation	training firm
Polska Izba Firm Szkoleniowych	Polish Chamber of Training Firms	training firm
Bractwo Kawalerów Gutenberga	Brotherhood of Gutenberg Knights	non-governmental organisation
Fundacja na Rzecz Kobiet JA KOBIETA (Forum 50+)	Foundation for Women “JA KOBIETA”, 50+ Forum	non-governmental organisation
Fundacja Rozwoju Systemu Edukacji	Foundation for the Development of the Education System	non-governmental organisation
Polska Fundacja Ośrodków Wspomagania Rozwoju Gospodarczego „OIC Poland”	Polish Foundation of Opportunities Industrialization Centers “OIC Poland”	non-governmental organisation
Społeczne Towarzystwo Oświatowe	Social Association of Education	non-governmental organisation
Stowarzyszenie ACUS – Akademia Rozwoju i Inspiracji Młodego Człowieka	ACUS Association – Academy to Develop and Inspire the Young Person	non-governmental organisation
Stowarzyszenie Towarzystwa Oświatowego	Society of Education Associations	non-governmental organisation

Appendix 8. Timetable of the first stage of the debate

DATE	MEETINGS OF GROUP 1	MEETINGS OF GROUP 2	MEETINGS OF GROUP 3
16.02.2011	Beginning of the debate. Conference opening the debate.		
16.02.2011	Meetings on the general solutions of the qualifications system	Work on the catalogue of barriers to learning	Identification of known methods used to validate learning outcomes in Poland
08.03.2011	—	—	—
29.03.2011	—	—	—
05.04.2011	Meetings on the proposed PQF model, especially the descriptors	Developing the set of proposed activities to reduce barriers to learning	Formulation of proposals for the validation system and quality assurance of qualifications
19.04.2011	—	—	—
11.05.2011	—	—	—
17.05.2011	Meetings on the proposed PQF model, especially the descriptors	—	Formulation of proposals for the validation system and quality assurance of qualifications
07.06.2011	—	—	—
15.06.2011	Summary. Conference summarising the public debate.	—	—

Source: /BE.

Appendix 9. Timetable of the second stage of the debate

DATE	MEETINGS OF GROUP 1	MEETINGS OF GROUP 2	MEETINGS OF GROUP 3
21.11.2011	Beginning of the debate. Conference opening the debate.		
07.02.2012	—	Studying the procedures used to validate learning outcomes in non-formal education and informal learning. Ensuring the quality of qualifications awarded outside of the formal education system – analysis of the current status given the perspective of establishing the national qualifications system – presentation of partial research results. Assigning qualifications to PQF levels.	
08.02.2012	Presentation of the concept of PQF level descriptors.	—	—
20.03.2012	—	—	State of work on proposals for the NQS institution.
21.03.2012	—	Comparing the ECTS and ECVET systems. Initial design of the standards for describing qualifications.	—
10.04.2012	Presentation of descriptors for general and vocational education at levels 1 and 2.	—	—
07–08.05.2012	Meeting with international experts.		
25.05.2012	Presentation of proposed sets of information collected in the national qualifications register. Introduction to the issue of the quality assurance of qualifications. Introduction to the analysis of threats to quality assurance.		Ensuring the quality assurance of qualifications.
23.10.2012	Summary of the spring round of meetings. Information on the status of work in the project. Presentation of the draft version of the referencing report, to be amended as the result of consultations. Presenting IT tools to support consultations with the project's stakeholders on the referencing report and other proposed solutions to modernize the NQS.		
10.12.2012	Information on the state of work on the referencing report, taking into consideration the results of consultations with stakeholders. Qualifications in a modernized national qualifications system. Proposals on the principles of assigning qualifications to PQF levels. Results of the work of sectoral teams.		
12.03.2013	Quality assurance of qualifications.		
24.09.2013	Summary. Conference summarising the public debate.		

Source: /BE.

Appendix 10. Evaluation questionnaire results of the public debate participants

A questionnaire was prepared for the summary meeting of the first part of the public debate to assess the process and effectiveness of the consultations. It was filled out by 86 participants.

53 persons responded that the debate was very much needed (62.4% of responses), 31 persons (36.5%) acknowledged that the debate was needed, while one person stated that the debate was “neither needed nor not needed”.

50 persons acknowledged that they had asked questions during the debate (58.8% of responses) and 35 persons stated that they had not asked a question. 56 persons believed that they had the opportunity to express their opinions (65.1%), 7 persons responded that they did not have such an opportunity (8.1%), and 23 persons stated that they did not express their opinions (26.7%).

During the debate, 64 persons (74.4% of responses) looked for information on the website www.kwalifikacje.org.pl, whereas the remaining respondents did not visit the website during the debate. 77 persons felt well-informed about the debate (93.9% of responses), while 5 persons (6.1%) did not feel well-informed. The remaining few persons did not respond to this question.

In response to the question: “How do you assess the readiness of persons leading the debate to search for solutions”, 59 persons (73.8%) responded “high”, 20 persons (25%) “average” and 1 person answered “low”.

77 persons (91.7%) responded that they “feel better informed about the PQF after the public debate”, whereas 7 persons (8.3%) stated that this is not the case.

When asked “Did the debate influence the final design of the PQF”, 71 persons (88.1) responded in the affirmative, and 9 persons, or 11.3%, stated that the debate will not have an influence on the final design of the PQF. The remaining participants did not answer this question.

The next question, asking if the public debate was necessary, was a control with only two response choices, and not three as in the earlier question. 78 persons (94%) answered “yes” and 5 persons (6%) “no”. The remaining three persons did not respond to this question.

When asked “why was the debate necessary”, respondents replied:

- The public debate allowed for the presentation of various opinions from different communities, who spoke using differing terminology and concepts about qualifications. This allowed confrontations to occur of these opinions and for doubts to be raised.
- The debate enabled deeper knowledge to be gained about the PQF and engaged professional communities that will be using the frameworks in the future.
- The public consultations allowed earlier entries to be analysed and modified to the benefit of the PQF.
- The debate was an opportunity to confront the assumed premises with the labour market, it allowed for a practical viewpoint, it also pointed out the role of career counselling.
- The debate provided an opportunity for all stakeholders to express their views in a public forum, it awakened interest in the process of developing the NQF.

Some respondents pointed out the great need for the debate: according to one respondent, the debate “revealed the imperfections of the project and the enormous gaps in knowledge about specific areas of the project”. According to another respondent, the debate showed “how little awareness continues to exist, how many issues are not yet understood, the need to explain the PQF”.

Another respondent expressed the hope that “the debate would be the basis to develop a program of ongoing contacts and information checking” (regarding the PQF – ed.).

When asked if the respondents “will be submitting a dissenting opinion to the report”, 11 persons (14.3%) stated “yes” and 66 (85.7%) responded “no”.

Another respondent expressed the hope that the “debate will be the basis to develop a program of continuing contacts and exchange of information” (on the PQF – ed.).

The respondents asked organisers the following questions:

- When will the PQF become an element of compulsory law and how long will work be carried out on developing it? Will we introduce the frameworks on time?
- What will be the costs of introducing the NQF, what will be the sources of funding for certifying the population, for the awarding bodies?
- How will the NQF impact the level of vocational qualifications of the population? Does the NQF include regulated professions?
- One respondent “would like to define the role of career counselling in the NQF”. Another asked „what is the essence of the PQF from the perspective of vocational freedom – qualifications and creativity, innovation, a firm’s success?”
- One respondent asked that different terms be found for such concepts as generic descriptors and other terms related to certification.

Participants took part in various numbers of debate meetings. The public debate took place in three thematic groups, each group met five times. 20 persons declared that they had attended one meeting, the same number of persons stated that they had participated in four meetings. 11 persons attended two meetings, 17 in three and 16 persons in five meetings. The remaining respondents did not respond to this question. The highest number of respondents participated in the meetings of group 3 (29 persons), 22 declared participation in group 1, while 15 persons indicated that they had participated in group 2. Some respondents attended the meetings of two, or even three groups. Several respondents did not provide an answer to this question.

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IBE is implementing the following systemic projects: The development of terms of reference for the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework and the National Qualifications Register for lifelong learning / Quality and effectiveness of education – strengthening of institutional research capabilities / Developing the national qualifications system – pilot implementation of the national qualifications system and its promotion (NQS Pilot Project) / Developing the national qualifications system – preparing to implement the Integrated Qualifications Register for lifelong learning (IQR) / Development of methodology for assessment of educational added value (EWD) / Nationwide survey – skills of third year pupils (OBUT).