

Referencing Report

I REFERENCING THE POLISH QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK FOR LIFELONG LEARNING TO THE EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK



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The Polish referencing report

Each European Union country working on qualifications frameworks prepares a document that describes its qualifications system and qualifications framework, which is then referenced to the European Qualifications Framework. This document is known as the referencing report. The Polish referencing report was approved by the Committee for European Affairs of the Council of Ministers and then presented at the forum of the European Qualifications Framework Advisory Group of the European Commission on May 29, 2013.

Presenting the referencing report and discussing it in an international forum enables the qualifications awarded in a given country to be compared to those from other EU countries.

The primary aim of presenting specific referencing reports is to provide information on the solutions developed in a particular country to persons and institutions from other European countries. And because people from other countries are most often not familiar with the education systems of particular countries or their awarded qualifications, referencing reports must be prepared in such a way as to be understandable and credible to all interested persons. For this reason, the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) Advisory Group (appointed by the European Commission) developed guidelines for preparing the referencing report, including on how national qualifications frameworks should be referenced to the European Qualifications Framework. These guidelines are set forth in ten points, known as the referencing criteria.

According to these criteria, referencing reports should be approved by a country's relevant public authorities, as well as be assessed by international experts. After these criteria are met, the report is presented at the European forum, where after its acceptance, it may be published.

This is also the procedure followed with the Polish report. According to the criteria, the report was prepared and approved by the relevant authorities, in particular the Inter-ministerial Taskforce for Lifelong Learning. The approval procedure is found in the section describing the referencing criteria.

The Polish referencing report was prepared within the framework of a systemic project implemented by the Educational Research Institute (IBE), entitled "The development of terms of reference for the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework and the National Qualifications Register for lifelong learning". Work on the report began in mid-2011. It was developed with the involvement of four international experts from Austria, Germany, Hungary and Scotland.

The report includes information on:

- the formal general, vocational and higher education systems in Poland and their reforms,
- the current state of the Polish qualifications system,
- directions to be taken to modernise the qualifications system.

The report also describes the situation and activities underway in the area of non-formal education.

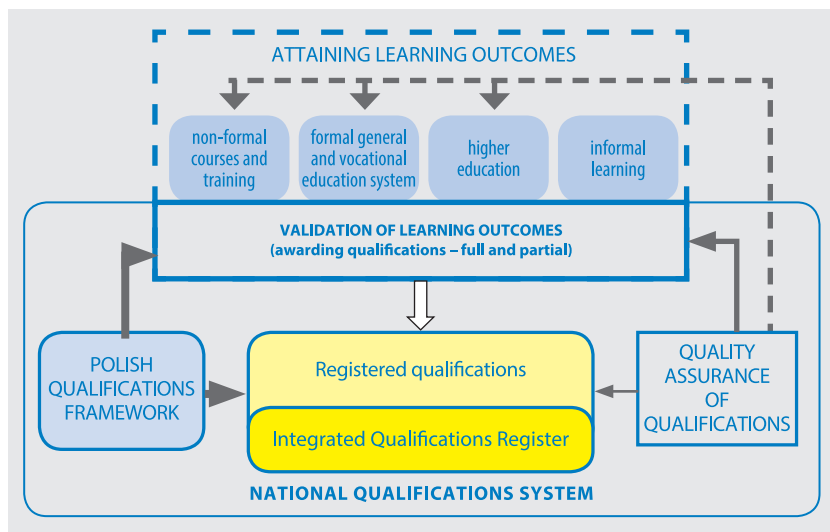
The integrated qualifications system in Poland

This system will consist of several interrelated components:

- the Polish Qualifications Framework,
- an Integrated Qualifications Register,
- quality assurance of qualifications,
- standards for validating competences,
- a credit accumulation and transfer system.

The integrated national qualifications system will be comprised of elements already functioning in Polish social and economic life, as well as tools that are currently being developed, of which the most important are the Polish Qualifications Framework and the Integrated Qualifications Register.

General overview of the national qualifications system in Poland



Source: IBE.

The Polish Qualifications Framework

The main element of the new qualifications system is the Polish Qualifications Framework (PQF). The PQF, like the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), consists of eight levels of qualifications. Each level is described by general statements characterising the learning outcomes (known as “descriptors”), which must be attained for a qualification at a given level. Learning outcomes can be attained through formal education as well as in other ways.

The PQF levels define the requirements that must be achieved by a learner in three areas: knowledge, skills and social competence. A unique solution used in Poland is the principle that the description of the requirements (“descriptor”) for each level reflects varying degrees of detail:

- first, there are universal level descriptors, that is, those that apply to all types of education,
- second, there are more specific level descriptors, typical for general, vocational or higher education.

The descriptors can have an even greater degree of detail – for example, descriptors were developed in higher education for the eight broad areas of study, as well as for specific economic sectors (e.g. financial services and sports).

The PQF includes all types of qualifications:

- full (corresponding to successive levels of education),
- partial (various diplomas or certificates confirming a narrower scope of attained knowledge, skills and social competence).

The PQF will enable the various qualifications systems functioning in Poland to be integrated. Currently, qualifications are awarded within formal general, vocational and higher education systems, as well as outside of these systems by different entities, institutions and organisations. They function on the basis of various legal acts or other regulations of varying rank, issued by different entities: professional groups, organisations, training institutions. **Implementing the PQF will conclude the cycle of reforms being introduced in the formal general, vocational and higher education systems, and at the same time stimulate the development of qualifications attained outside of these systems.**

Diagram of the Polish Qualifications Framework (knowledge, skills and social competence on eight levels)



Source: IBE.

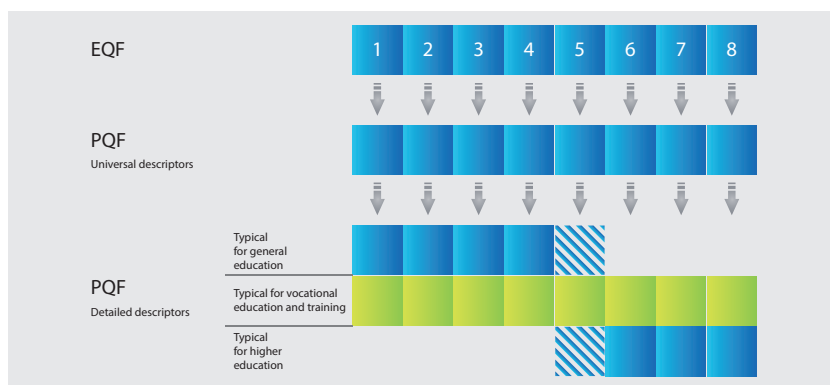
Key descriptive categories and aspects of fundamental significance for the comprehensive description of knowledge, skills and social competence

Learning outcome group	Key descriptive categories	Essential aspects for a complete description
Knowledge	Scope	– Completeness of the cognitive perspective
	Depth of understanding	– Dependencies
Skills	Problem solving and applying knowledge in practice	– Complexity of the problem – Innovation in the approach – Autonomy in acting – Conditions under which one acts
	Learning	– Autonomy – Methods
	Communication	– Scope of expression – Complexity of expression
Social competence	Identity	– Participation – Sense of responsibility – Conduct
	Cooperation	– Team work – Conditions under which one acts – Leadership
	Responsibility	– Consequences of one's own actions – Consequences of the team's actions – Evaluation

Source: IBE.

It is anticipated that qualifications awarded within the formal general, vocational and higher education systems will have their PQF levels noted on diplomas or certificates as of the 2013/2014 school year, before the Integrated Qualifications Register is implemented, on the basis of regulations issued by relevant ministers.

Structure of the Polish Qualifications Framework



Source: IBE.



The Integrated Qualifications Register

The register will collect reliable information on registered qualifications, that is, those that meet the conditions required for the future modernised national qualifications system defined in the laws establishing the principles of its governance. Today, there is no comprehensive and commonly available information on the competences that can be attained, where they can be attained, and the requirements and conditions that need to be fulfilled in order to have a particular qualification awarded. This information is available from various sectors or directly from the institutions awarding the qualifications. The IQR fills this gap.

The integrated register will include qualifications regardless of registries and lists that already exist or will be created in the future for specific departments, industries, communities and institutions in Poland. This register will enable information to be readily accessible in one place for all interested persons.

The qualifications entered into the IQR will meet specific requirements of quality assurance and methods of validating learning outcomes. Entering a qualification into the integrated register will be associated with having a PQF level assigned to it.

The register will first include qualifications awarded in formal education – the formal general and vocational education system and higher education. Then, qualifications awarded outside of the formal education system by various institutions and sectoral organisations will be entered.

In cases of qualifications awarded by various organisations, they will be entered into the register in two ways:

1. An interested institution or organisation develops a proposed qualification according to the requirements set forth in the law and submits this to the relevant minister with an application for its entry into the register. The minister or an authorised entity decides whether or not to enter the qualification into the register and grant it the status of a registered qualification. After being informed of the decision, the register operator enters (records) the qualification into the register.
2. The institution or organisation reports only a justified need to develop a new qualification (including, for example, the proposed design). Then a team of experts working with the register operator and the minister responsible for the given qualification develops it so that it meets the legal requirements. In this option, the decision to enter the qualification into the register is made by the relevant minister (or his/her authorised entity).

Various diplomas and certificates not found in the register can continue to function as in the past to the extent that they are needed by society. However, they will not have a PQF level assigned. The information collected in the integrated register will be made available through an Internet portal. This portal, like similar portals in other EU countries, will be linked to the portal of the European Qualifications Framework.¹

After implementing the new solutions, all qualifications awarded in the formal general, vocational and higher education systems will be entered into the Integrated Qualifications Register. In cases where similar sets of data already exist (for example, the POL-on higher education information system), qualifications will be incorporated into the IQR by using existing records.

¹ More information on the portal is provided on page 14.

Qualifications awarded in the Polish formal general and vocational education system below higher education (children and youth) and their proposed PQF levels

Type of school	Type of certificate Name of qualification	Proposed PQF level
Primary school	Certificate of primary school completion	1
Lower secondary school	Certificate of lower secondary school completion	2
Basic vocational school	Certificate of vocational qualifications	3
	Diploma of vocational qualifications	3
Technical upper secondary school	Certificate of vocational qualifications	3 or 4 depending on the qualification
	Diploma of vocational qualifications	4
	<i>Matura</i> certificate	4
General upper secondary school	<i>Matura</i> certificate	4



Dr. Agnieszka Chłoń-Domińczak, leader of the „European-style Qualifications” Project at the Educational Research Institute

Qualifications awarded in the Polish higher education system

Type of studies	Name of qualification	ECTS credits	Planned qualification level in the PQF
First cycle studies (Bologna first cycle)	Diploma certifying the professional title of licencjat / inżynier or an equivalent title	At least 180	6
Second cycle studies (Bologna second cycle) or Long cycle studies	Diploma certifying the professional title of Magister / magister inżynier or an equivalent title (for example, physician)	Second cycle studies – at least 90 Long cycle master's degree studies: at least 300 (five-year studies), 360 (six-year studies)	7
Third cycle studies (Bologna third cycle)	Diploma certifying the academic degree of <i>doktor</i> in a specific discipline	45–60	8
Additionally:			
Postgraduate non-degree studies	Certificates of completion of postgraduate non-degree studies	At least 60; (the duration of the studies should not be less than two semesters)	Depending on the programme

Quality assurance of qualifications

Several pillars ensure the reliability of the qualifications' quality assurance system:

- The principles must be universal, without specifying the way the quality assurance is carried out.
- Various institutions and organisations must be involved in working together on the development, and then implementation of these principles.
- All entities performing tasks related to external monitoring are directly or indirectly overseen by the relevant public authorities.

Quality assurance is a permanent component of many procedures associated with awarding qualifications in Poland. The entire quality assurance system introduced in formal general, vocational and higher education already conforms to such principles and standards, but the quality assurance measures used to ensure the quality of qualifications awarded outside of the formal education systems do not always use or fully meet these standards.

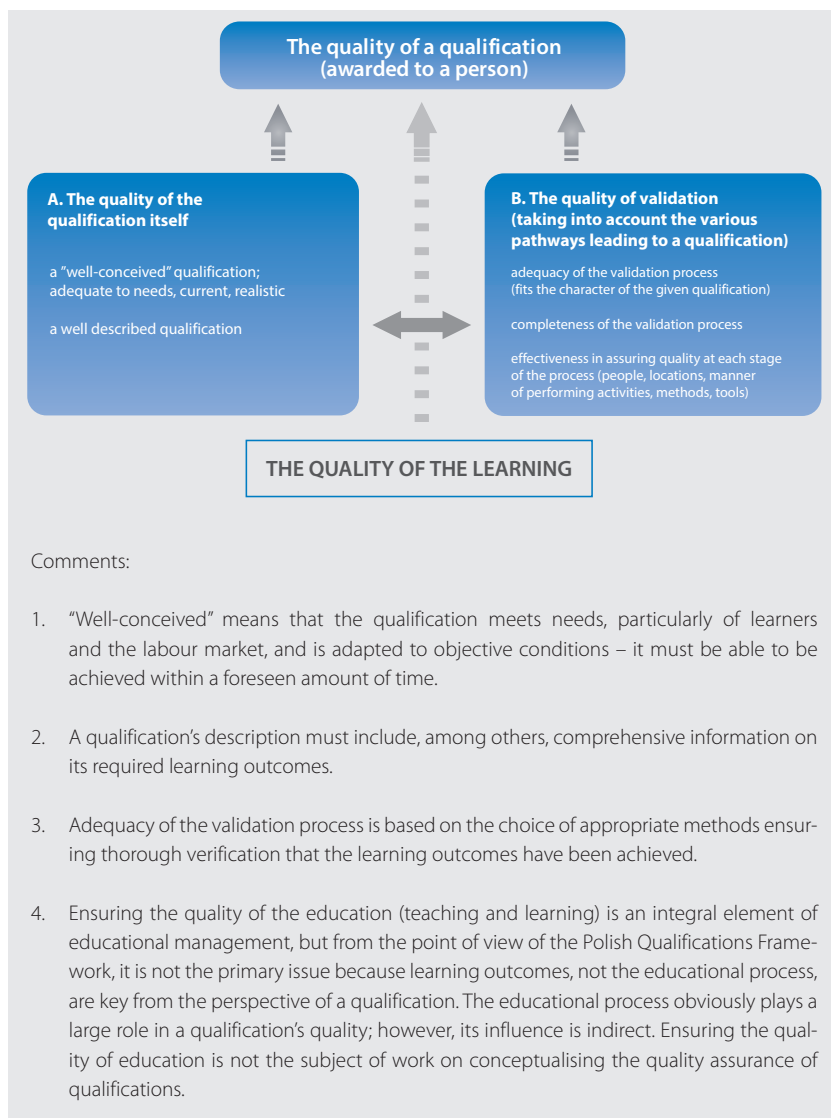
International experiences and good practices of qualifications systems developed by various institutions and industries within the country were used to formulate the general principles of quality assurance.

The principles of the quality assurance of qualifications:

- Solutions related to an internal as well as an external system of quality assurance should be applied. Ensuring quality is the responsibility of the institutions awarding the qualification, but external monitoring methods are also used.
- Internal and external quality assurance systems should be appropriately related.
- Each system should take into account the specificity of the awarded qualification.
- The system should undergo improvement and be periodically reviewed.
- The public should have access to information about the systems and the results of their periodic reviews.
- The system provides information about problems, including submitted reclamations, complaints and appeals, as well as the operational procedures used to respond to problems.
- Each awarding body should have an internal quality assurance system.
- The internal quality assurance system for qualifications should be an integral part of an awarding body's management system.
- The internal quality assurance system should appropriately take into account the role of teachers and persons performing validation.
- The internal quality assurance system should appropriately take into account the role of learners.
- The internal quality assurance system should appropriately take into account the role of representatives of the relevant external communities.

Currently, the Educational Research Institute is conducting research on the quality of qualifications. This work is being carried out through discussions and the provision of expert opinions, as well as through debates with stakeholders. In the course of this work, three main groups of factors of qualifications' quality were identified. These are: the quality of the qualification "as such", the quality of the validation process and the quality of teaching and learning.

Factors determining the quality of qualifications



Comments:

1. "Well-conceived" means that the qualification meets needs, particularly of learners and the labour market, and is adapted to objective conditions – it must be able to be achieved within a foreseen amount of time.
2. A qualification's description must include, among others, comprehensive information on its required learning outcomes.
3. Adequacy of the validation process is based on the choice of appropriate methods ensuring thorough verification that the learning outcomes have been achieved.
4. Ensuring the quality of the education (teaching and learning) is an integral element of educational management, but from the point of view of the Polish Qualifications Framework, it is not the primary issue because learning outcomes, not the educational process, are key from the perspective of a qualification. The educational process obviously plays a large role in a qualification's quality; however, its influence is indirect. Ensuring the quality of education is not the subject of work on conceptualising the quality assurance of qualifications.

Source: IBE.

The validation of learning outcomes

One of the important objectives of the forthcoming modernisation of the qualifications system in Poland is to develop the principles, standards and methods of validation (confirming the attained learning outcomes) while ensuring the transparency of these processes. Work on validating learning outcomes attained outside of the formal education system presents a particular challenge.

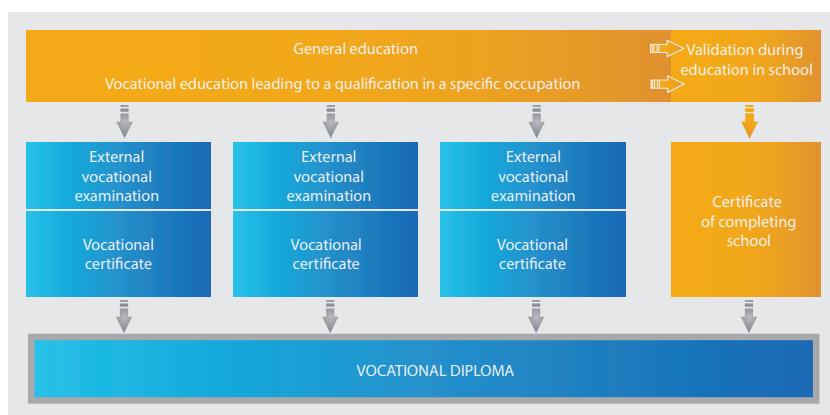
Today, people who are at least 18 years of age may take extramural examinations conducted by Regional Examination Boards. After such an examination has been passed, a certificate can be awarded of completing the relevant type of any formal general education school (primary school, lower secondary school or upper secondary school) and vocational qualification attained in schools of the formal education system. It is also possible to have vocational qualifications certificates awarded on the basis of passing extramural examinations.

In higher education, the procedures for validating learning outcomes achieved outside of this formal system are determined by individual higher education institutions. An important direction of development of the national qualifications system is to increase the ability to have learning outcomes that were attained outside of a higher education institution be validated by that institution. Work is underway on developing such procedures, which will also be supported by planned amendments to the Law on Higher Education.

An example of enabling validation outside of the formal general, vocational and higher education systems is the procedure introduced by the Act on promoting employment, which allows participants of "adult vocational training" to take "assessment examinations".

Various legal regulations and acts grant specific entities providing non-formal education the authority to award certificates and diplomas. A variety of solutions and procedures are used to determine the conditions for admission to the validation process and the procedures of its performance.

Attaining a vocational diploma through the formal vocational education system



Source: IBE.

Credit accumulation and transfer

Experts are working on developing a concept of credit accumulation and transfer. The Polish model of credit accumulation and transfer is to be compatible with European procedures (ECTS – European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System – used today in higher education, ECVET – European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training). This will allow credits to be transferred between the Polish qualifications system and the systems of different EU member states. A system based on ECTS credits already operates in the Polish higher education system. The vocational education reforms that have been implemented since 2012 introduced basic procedures for accumulating and transferring credits, especially to validate learning outcomes acquired in short-term, out-of-school training (vocational skills courses) and to enable learners to take vocational extramural examinations (for validation).

As a result of clear and coherent principles of credit accumulation and transfer, also applied in formal education, the transparency of the qualifications included in the Integrated Qualifications Register will increase.



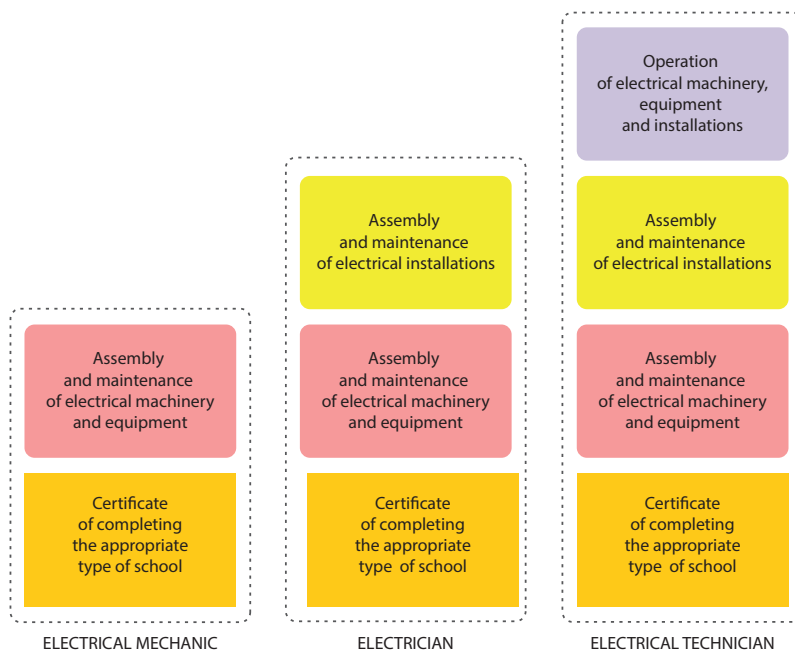
Małgorzata Marcińska, Undersecretary of State at the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy

The national qualifications system portal

The portal will be a repository in electronic form of all data related to the qualifications awarded in Poland. It will include:

- basic information about each qualification – its official name, the assigned PQF level and learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and social competence) that need to be validated in order to attain it (the required competences);
- supplemental information about the qualification – pre-requisite education (or qualifications) to begin attaining the given qualification, other pre-requisite conditions, the subsequent qualifications that can be attained after its acquisition, the credentials associated with the given qualification, the duration of the awarded qualification, the type of document certifying the qualification;
- information on using the qualification – the types of activities (including professional ones) that cannot be undertaken without the qualification, desired predispositions, medical contraindications, specific conditions of work of the given qualification, etc.; and
- information about how to attain the qualification, including the awarding institutions and methods used to validate learning outcomes (theoretical examination, practical exam, portfolio).

Example of attaining occupations by adding successive qualifications



Source: IBE.



Involvement of social partners

The PQF was developed with the use of analyses and research, as well as through consultations with many institutions working in the fields of education, training, science and the labour market. This enables the solutions developed to be tailored to the needs of stakeholders. Many countries in Europe expressed great interest in such a broad consideration of both research and consultations, as they less frequently used such approaches. The public debate involved more than 200 individuals representing about one hundred different institutions and organisations. They include representatives of ministries, employment offices, employers' organisations (representing various sectors), trade unions, public institutions implementing educational activities, commercial training firms, institutions related to the education system, associations and non-governmental organisations, research institutions and consulting firms.

The public debate was held in several stages. The first stage of the debate began in February 2011 and lasted four months; the second stage began in November 2011.

Additionally, IBE works with representatives of various economic sectors to develop the principles of assigning PQF levels to qualifications, as well as to make the initial assignments to levels.

In March 2012, work began with persons involved in designing and awarding qualifications in four sectors: social services, financial services, the electrical-electronic and construction industries. Each team selected at least eight qualifications in its field, specified their PQF levels and proposed a methodology of assigning PQF levels to qualifications. This work resulted in a joint paper entitled "The principles of assigning qualifications to levels in the Polish Qualifications Framework – conclusions from the work of sectoral teams". The practical verification of their proposals began in the late autumn of 2012. In effect, PQF levels were initially determined for 413 qualifications.

As part of the public debate, IBE organised an expert consultative group on qualifications' quality assurance. It is made up of 12 experts representing vocational education and higher education, training institutions, sectoral organisations and public employment services. They will develop the principles of the quality assurance of qualifications. A document has been written that describes threats to qualifications' quality assurance, proposes remedial actions and provides a set of principles to ensure quality. Currently, consultations are underway to verify the proposals that have been developed.

The 10 referencing criteria

Criterion 1. The responsibilities and/or legal competence of all relevant national bodies involved in the referencing process, including the National Coordination Point, are clearly determined and published by the competent public authorities.²

In 2010, the Prime Minister established the Inter-ministerial Taskforce for Lifelong Learning, including the National Qualifications Framework to coordinate activities for the implementation of policy objectives in Poland for lifelong learning. The Taskforce is chaired by the Minister of National Education, and includes the Minister of Science and Higher Education, the Minister of Economy, the Minister of Labour and Social Policy, the Minister of Regional Development, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Head of the Chancellery of the Prime Minister.

The main responsibilities of the Taskforce are:

- to develop a strategic document on solutions for lifelong learning in Poland,
- to monitor the implementation of policies for lifelong learning, including the development of the PQF,
- to initiate cooperation between national government administrative bodies and social partners,
- to initiate and monitor Polish participation in the work carried out in the European Union on lifelong learning, including the European Qualifications Framework.

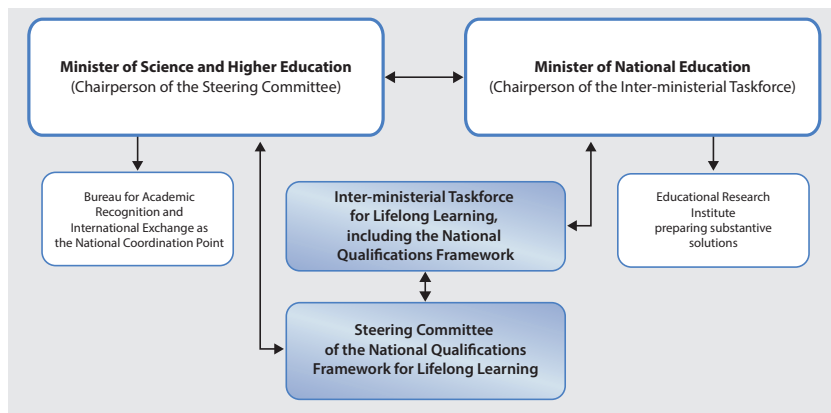
In order to monitor the development and implementation of the PQF, a sub-team was established of the Inter-ministerial Taskforce – the Steering Committee of the National Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (Steering Committee of the NQF). Chaired by the Minister of Science and Higher Education, the Committee is comprised of representatives from 11 ministries. The Committee can also invite consultants to join in its work: experts and representatives of employers' organisations, trade unions, education system institutions, higher education institutions, institutions providing training for the labour market and civil society, as well as qualifications awarding bodies.

Since 2010, the Bureau for Academic Recognition and International Exchange (BUWiWM) serves as the National Coordination Point (NCP). The tasks of the NCP are "to ensure access to information and guidance on the relationship between the national qualifications system and the European Qualifications Framework and to promote the participation of stakeholders in the effort to compare and use qualifications at the European level". Representatives of the Bureau represent Poland at international meetings of the National Coordination Points.

At the same time, in 2010, the Minister of National Education commissioned the Educational Research Institute (IBE) in Warsaw to prepare comprehensive substantive proposals for the implementation of the Polish Qualifications Framework and prepare a draft referencing report. IBE experts also participate in the work of the EQF Advisory Group.

² For the official Polish translation – see E. Chmielecka (ed.) (2010). *Autonomia programowa uczelni. Ramy kwalifikacji dla szkolnictwa wyższego [Programme autonomy of higher education institutions. The higher education qualifications framework]*. This footnote refers to all criteria.

Institutions involved in preparing for the implementation of an integrated qualifications system based on the Polish Qualifications Framework



Source: IBE.

Criterion 2. There is a clear and demonstrable link between the qualifications levels in the national qualifications framework or system and the level descriptors of the European Qualifications Framework.

The Polish Qualifications Framework (PQF) distinguishes eight levels that correspond to the levels of the EQF. Confirmation of the congruence between PQF and EQF levels was provided by the results of the following analyses:

- a comparison of basic concepts, the language of the descriptions and assumptions of the PQF and EQF,
- a comparison of the descriptors at the corresponding levels of both frameworks.

The entries in the PQF's columns – knowledge, skills, social competence – refer to specific areas of learning or occupational activity. The phrase “knows and understands” is used for the category of “knowledge”; the phrase “is able to” is used for the category of “skills”. The phrase “is ready to” was accepted for the category of “social competence”, by which two essential aspects are linked: axiological and psychological.

Table 1. Comparison of the language of basic concepts (categories of learning outcomes) in the PQF and EQF.

The definitions of knowledge, skills and competence in the EQF were taken from the official translation of the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning.

Knowledge		Skills		Social competence	Competence
PQF	EQF	PQF	EQF	PQF	EQF
A set of descriptions of facts, principles, theories and practices assimilated during the learning process, relating to a field of learning or professional activity.	The outcome of the assimilation of information through learning. Knowledge is the body of facts, principles, theories and practices that is related to a field of work or study. In the context of the EQF, knowledge is described as theoretical and/or factual.	The ability to carry out tasks and solve problems related to the relevant field of learning or professional activity.	The ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems. In the context of the European Qualifications Framework, skills are described as cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) or practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments).	The ability to shape one's own development as well as participate in professional and social life autonomously and responsibly, while taking into consideration the ethical context of one's own conduct.	The proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional development, in the context of the European Qualifications Framework, competence is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy.
The definition in the PQF reflects the exact meaning of the definition provided in the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008. In the Polish understanding of the concepts "facts", "theories" or "rules of conduct", the theoretical or factual nature of knowledge is implied (implicit) in these terms.		The definition adopted in the PQF directly refers to the definition in the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008. "Cognitive" and "practical" skills are not distinguished in the Polish language and therefore this passage is omitted – it is treated as self-evident.		The PQF adopted the term "social competence", which in Polish best captures the meaning of this category of outcomes. The definition adopted in the PQF is consistent with the definition in the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008. It accurately reflects the meaning of the provisions contained in the EQF. The Polish language has no equivalent of the expression "proven ability to use". The literal translation of this phrase would be misleading. The accepted definition omits this word, as reference is made to validated learning outcomes in the context of the qualifications system.	

Table 2. The Polish Qualifications Framework – universal descriptors.

PQF descriptors illustrate the accrual of learning outcomes, from the lowest to the highest level.

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Level 7	Level 8
KNOWLEDGE a person knows and understands:	elementary facts and concepts as well as the dependencies between selected natural and social phenomena and the products of human thought.	a broadened set of basic facts, simple concepts as well as the dependencies between selected natural and social phenomena and the products of human thought.	basic facts and concepts as well as the dependencies between selected natural and social phenomena and the products of human thought; and also a broader scope of selected facts, concepts and dependencies in specific areas; the elementary conditions of conducted activities.	a broadened set of basic facts, moderately complex concepts and theories as well as the dependencies between selected natural and social phenomena and the products of human thought; and also a broader scope of selected facts, concepts, theories in specific areas and the dependencies between them; the basic conditions of conducted activities.	a broad scope of facts, theories, methods and the dependencies between them; the diverse conditions of conducted activities.	an advanced level of facts, theories, methods and the complex dependencies between them; the diverse, complex conditions of conducted activities.	an in-depth level of selected facts, theories, methods and complex dependencies between them, also in relationship to other fields; the diverse, complex conditions and axiological context of conducted activities.	the world's scientific and creative achievements and the resulting implications of this for practice.

Table 2. The Polish Qualifications Framework – universal descriptors.

PQF descriptors illustrate the accrual of learning outcomes, from the lowest to the highest level.

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Level 7	Level 8
SKILLS	carry out very simple tasks according to detailed instructions under typical conditions;	complete simple tasks following general instructions most often under typical conditions;	complete moderately complex tasks following general instructions under partially variable conditions;	complete moderately complex tasks, partially without instruction, often under variable conditions;	complete tasks without instruction under variable, predictable conditions;	innovatively complete tasks and resolve problems which are complex and non-routine under variable and not fully predictable conditions;	complete tasks as well as formulate and solve problems with the use of new knowledge, also from other fields;	analyse and creatively synthesise scientific and creative achievements to identify and solve research problems as well as those related to innovative and creative activities;
a person is able to:	solve very simple, routine problems under typical conditions;	solve simple, routine problems most often under typical conditions;	solve simple, routine problems under partially variable conditions;	solve moderately complex and somewhat non-routine problems often under variable conditions;	solve moderately complex and non-routine problems under variable, predictable conditions;	autonomously plan one's lifelong learning;	independently plan one's own lifelong learning and direct others in this area;	problems as those related to innovative and creative activities;
	learn under direct guidance in a structured form;	learn under guidance in a structured form;	learn partially autonomously under guidance in a structured form;	learn autonomously in a structured form;	learn autonomously;	communicate in one's environment, substantiate one's position.	communicate with various groups of respondents, appropriately substantiate one's position.	contribute new elements to these achievements;
	understand simple statements and formulate very simple statements.	understand moderately complex statements; formulate simple statements;	understand moderately complex statements; formulate moderately complex statements;	understand complex statements; formulate moderately complex statements on a broad range of issues;	understand moderately complex statements, using specialised terminology;			independently plan one's own development as well as inspire the development of others;
		formulate and understand the simplest statements in a foreign language.	understand and formulate very simple statements in a foreign language.	understand and formulate simple statements in a foreign language.	understand and formulate very simple statements in a foreign language using specialised terminology.			participate in the exchange of experiences and ideas, also in the international community.

Table 2. The Polish Qualifications Framework – universal descriptors.

PQF descriptors illustrate the accrual of learning outcomes, from the lowest to the highest level.

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Level 7	Level 8
SOCIAL COMPETENCE	respect the obligations arising from membership in various communities; act and cooperate with others under direct supervision in structured conditions;	assume the obligations arising from membership in various communities; act and cooperate with others under direction in structured conditions; evaluate the actions in which one participates and take responsibility for the results of those actions.	be a member of various types of communities, function in various social roles and assume the basic obligations ensuing from this; act and cooperate with others partially autonomously in structured conditions; evaluate one's own actions and those of the team; take responsibility for the results of those actions.	assume responsibility for participating in various communities and functioning in various social roles; act and cooperate with others autonomously under structured conditions; evaluate one's own actions and those of persons one is directing; take responsibility for the results of one's own actions as well as those of the persons one directs.	assume basic professional and social responsibilities, evaluate and interpret them; independently act and cooperate with others under structured conditions, direct a small team under structured conditions; evaluate one's own actions and those of others and the teams one directs; assume responsibility for the results of those actions.	cultivate and disseminate models of good practice in the workplace and beyond; make decisions independently; critically evaluate one's own actions; those of the team one directs and the organisations in which one participates; lead a group and take responsibility for it.	establish and develop models of good practice in the environments of work and life; initiate actions; critically assess oneself as well as the teams and organisations in which one participates; lead a group and take responsibility for their results and develop models of good practice in such situations.	conduct independent research which contributes to existing scientific and creative achievements; assume professional and public challenges and take into consideration their ethical dimension, responsibility for their results and develop models of good practice in such situations.

Criterion 3. The national qualifications framework or system and its qualifications are based on the principle and objective of learning outcomes and linked to arrangements for validation of non-formal and informal learning and, where these exist, to credit systems.

All qualifications awarded in Poland in the formal general, vocational and higher education systems are described in documents with the use of learning outcomes. In the solutions developed as part of modernising the national qualifications system, this principle has been extended to all qualifications that will be in the Integrated Qualifications Register.

Criterion 4. The procedures for inclusion of qualifications in the national qualifications framework or for describing the place of qualifications in the national qualification system are transparent.

In the future system, determining the PQF level of a qualification will be able to occur in two ways. For qualifications established by ministers (which are awarded based on regulations in the law) or institutions under their jurisdiction, assigning a PQF level will occur when the qualification is developed, and the formal determination of its PQF level will take place when the qualification comes into force.

In terms of the remaining qualifications, standards will be set on how they will have to be described, with the presentation of their learning outcomes, methods of validation and quality assurance. Procedures for entering qualifications into the integrated register will include a detailed study of the compatibility of their learning outcomes with PQF level descriptors. A quality assurance system will be developed for entering a qualification into the register through the process of having an application for this submitted by an interested entity. This will ensure the reliability of assigning a PQF level to a qualification.

Criterion 5. The national quality assurance system(s) for education and training refer(s) to the national qualifications framework or system and are consistent with the relevant European principles and guidelines.

Quality assurance procedures pertain to all qualifications awarded in the formal general and vocational education system as well as in higher education and also include certain qualifications awarded out-of-school, such as in the crafts trades. The formal general and vocational education system and higher education comply with European guidelines for quality assurance in vocational education and training – *European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET (EQARF)*, validation – *European Guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning* (CEDEFOP 2009), and higher education – *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*. Formal general and vocational education has a system of pedagogical supervision and an important role is also played by the external examination system. An independent institution – the Polish Accreditation Committee – is responsible for assessing higher education institutions. Its assessments are submitted to the Ministry of Science and Higher Education. One important aim of modernising the qualifications system is to expand systemic solutions for the quality assurance of all qualifications included in the Integrated Qualifications Register.

Criterion 6. The referencing process shall include the stated agreement of the relevant quality assurance bodies.

After the Inter-ministerial Taskforce for Lifelong Learning, including the National Qualifications Framework accepted the referencing report, it was presented to the following entities responsible for the quality assurance of the Polish qualifications system:

- Educational Quality Department in the Ministry of National Education,
- Central Examination Board,
- Polish Accreditation Committee.

After reading the referencing report, these institutions submitted comments and suggestions, which were included in the version presented to the Committee for European Affairs. The approved version of the report includes their positive assessments of the presented solutions.

Criterion 7. The referencing process shall involve international experts.

The international experts invited to work with us from Scotland, Germany, Austria and Hungary offer Poland valuable expertise. They are:

- Aileen Ponton, Chief Executive Officer of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership – the organisation responsible for implementing the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework and the qualifications register,
- Michael Schopf, a member of the steering committee for the German Qualifications Framework,
- Eduard Staudecker, from the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture in Austria and the Chief Executive Officer and project leader for developing the Austrian Qualifications Framework,
- Erzsébet Szlamka, member of the development team of the Hungarian Qualifications Framework, who brings extensive experience acquired at the National Institute of Vocational and Adult Education.

Criterion 8. The competent national body or bodies shall certify the referencing of the national qualifications framework or system with the EQF. One comprehensive report, setting out the referencing and the evidence supporting it shall be published by the competent national bodies, including the National Coordination Point, and shall address separately each of the criteria.

The proposed referencing report was presented to the Steering Committee for the National Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning for consultation. Once its members' comments were incorporated into the report, it was approved by the Inter-ministerial Taskforce for Lifelong Learning, including the National Qualifications Framework at its meeting of April 15, 2013.

After consultations with government ministries were completed, the referencing report was approved by the Committee for European Affairs, acting on behalf of the Council of Ministers (Government of the Republic of Poland) on May 15, 2013.

The referencing report will be posted on the government's official internet site.

Criterion 9. The official EQF platform shall maintain a public listing of member states that have confirmed that they have completed the referencing process, including links to completed referencing reports.

After completion of the referencing process, the referencing report will be submitted to the European Commission for inclusion into the official platform of the European Qualifications Framework.

Criterion 10. Following the referencing process, and in line with the timelines set in the Recommendation, all new qualification certificates, diplomas and Europass documents issued by the competent authorities contain a clear reference, by way of national qualifications systems, to the appropriate European Qualifications Framework level.

It is anticipated that the qualifications awarded in the formal general, vocational and higher education systems will have their PQF levels noted as of the 2013/2014 school year, before implementation of the Integrated Qualifications Register, on the basis of regulations issued by relevant ministers. The timeframe for having information about the PQF level included on all diplomas and certificates in the register, as well as Europass documents and others that relate to qualifications, will be determined after the relevant public authorities approve the scenario for implementing the integrated qualifications system. The implementation scenario is currently being discussed and negotiated with representatives of ministerial departments on the Steering Committee for the National Qualifications Framework.



Prof. Zbigniew Marciniak, Deputy Minister of Education (2007–2009) and Deputy Minister of Science and Higher Education (2010–2012)



Scenario for developing the qualifications system in Poland

In Poland, modernising the qualifications system is occurring simultaneously in a “top-down” and “bottom-up” manner. On one hand, the education system is being changed by public authorities, while on the other, it is also being changed by organisations and sectoral institutions.

New core curricula were introduced to the formal education system, which standardised the teaching programme in a new way and defined the general objectives and content framework for general education. As a result, schools are now able to independently develop their own teaching programmes. In 2007, a new general education core curriculum was developed, with its implementation initiated as of the 2009/2010 school year.

A new core curriculum was introduced in vocational education in the 2012/2013 school year.

The core curricula of general education and vocational education define examination requirements. They are the basis on which external examinations are conducted; they also serve as an important reference point for internal school assessments.

In higher education, elements of a modern qualifications system were introduced in accordance with the guidelines of the Bologna Process, in which Poland has been participating since 1999. The following mechanisms have been introduced: a three-cycle system of studies, the ECTS system, the required issuance of the Diploma Supplement, and a universally mandatory accreditation system. In Poland, work on the qualifications framework for higher education started in 2006, with the appointment of a Working Group for the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education by the Minister of Science and Higher Education. After the basic premises and general concept of the Framework were approved, the Working Group began preparing qualifications frameworks for the eight broad areas of study.

As of 2009, extensive consultations began, mainly with the academic community. Their aim was to prepare higher education institutions for the changes to be introduced in designing and carrying out study programmes. The Qualifications Framework for Higher Education served as the main theme of seminars and conferences organised in 2009–2011. On October 1, 2011, amendments to the Law on Higher Education of 18 March 2011 entered into force, enabling these new solutions to be implemented.

Similar activities are being undertaken by other ministries, such as, for example, the Ministry of Defence. In 2012, the Ministry initiated a process of identifying military specialisations that have their counterparts in the civilian labour market, and in the next stage, is planning to have military certificates certified for the civilian job market. Additionally, an appointed departmental team for the qualifications system of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland will diagnose the state of the existing system to describe the qualifications, as well as how to obtain and document them.

In order to change the qualifications system and recognise its significance in building human capital, successive Polish governments have addressed this issue in programmatic and strategic documents. The 2005–2008 Reform Programme approved by the Council of Ministers cites the implementation of a National Qualifications Framework consistent with the principles of the

European Qualifications Framework as an objective to be reached. Clauses related to developing national qualifications frameworks are also found in successive National Reform Programmes – for 2008–2011 and 2011–2014, as well as in other strategic government documents.

Work on the Polish Qualifications Framework began in 2008. The Minister of National Education appointed a working group of experts to prepare a draft of the PQF. Work on modernising the national qualifications system is being carried out by the Educational Research Institute (IBE) in Warsaw as part of a systemic project whose implementation is supervised by the Ministry of National Education.

As already noted, this work is being carried out under the auspices of the Inter-ministerial Taskforce for Lifelong Learning, including the National Qualifications Framework, and within its structure, by the Steering Committee of the National Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning.

The schedule of activities to modernise the Polish qualifications system includes:

- Preparation of a proposed, stakeholder-consulted Polish Qualifications Framework (PQF) based on an expert model. Work was completed in October 2012.
- Preparation of the substantive, institutional and organisational premises of the Integrated Qualifications Register. In November 2012, work was completed on the concept of the register, and initial operational tasks were begun. Work is also underway on the concept of computerising the national qualifications system, including the NQS Internet portal. These materials were presented in 2013 and will be the basis for further activities, which will enable the Integrated Qualifications Register to be launched.
- Preparation of the concept of quality assurance principles, including the methodology of validating learning outcomes (procedures for confirming competences). In October 2012, work was completed on the document, "The concept of quality assurance principles, including the methodology of validating learning outcomes, consulted with experts". This document was the starting point for preparing a concept that was developed at the end of 2013. Research and expert opinions on this issue will be included in the work on preparing the concept of quality assurance principles.
- Preparation of the concept of rules and procedures for assigning PQF levels to qualifications.³ In September 2012, work was completed on an initial proposal of the concept. A document was prepared, entitled "The rules for assigning qualifications to levels in the Polish Qualifications Framework – conclusions of the work of sectoral teams". This material provides a starting point for further work of the sectoral teams, which initially assigned PQF levels to over 400 qualifications in 2013. This task is closely related to the work of preparing at least three proposed sectoral qualifications frameworks in 2013.
- Preparation of the concept of an integrated system of credit accumulation and transfer for general education, vocational education and training, and higher education. The first material outlining the concept is the subject of discussions with stakeholders as of January 2013.
- Preparation of an expanded version of "A Glossary of Key Concepts related to the National Qualifications System". The new version was prepared together with experts from the Council for the Polish Language. This work will be completed with publication of the glossary in 2014.

³ This material was developed before it was determined that the PQF level is assigned to a qualification (and not vice-versa).

- An inventory will be made of all qualifications awarded on the basis of legal regulations in order to establish a qualifications map for Poland. The report on qualifications in Poland was completed in 2013.
- Information on the integrated qualifications system will continue to be systematically disseminated through the media, the website (www.kwalifikacje.edu.pl), printed materials and the organisation of conferences.
- The proposed referencing report was submitted for consultation to the Steering Committee of the National Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning. After including the comments submitted from the Committee, the report was approved by the Inter-ministerial Taskforce for Lifelong Learning, including the National Qualifications Framework on April 15, 2013. Subsequently, it was sent to the Committee for European Affairs (of the Council of Ministers), which approved the report on behalf of the government on May 15. The report was then presented to the forum of the European Qualifications Framework Advisory Group of the European Commission on May 29. The Advisory Group made some minor comments to the report. After responding to these issues, the revised report was again approved by the Inter-ministerial Taskforce for Lifelong Learning, including the National Qualifications Framework. The report received final approval from the Committee for European Affairs on September 2, 2013, and was sent to the European Commission for publication in the EQF Internet portal.

According to the adopted assumptions, the gradual implementation of new solutions of the integrated national qualifications system will occur as subsequent legal acts are passed. A milestone in the process of modernising the national qualifications system will be reached with the launching of the Integrated Qualifications Register.



From left: Prof. Daria Lipińska-Nałęcz (Undersecretary of State of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education), Małgorzata Marcińska (Undersecretary of State of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy) and Prof. Zbigniew Marciniak (IBE expert, former Deputy Minister of National Education, and of Science and Higher Education)

A Glossary of Key Concepts related to the National Qualifications System

The glossary consists of 17 main entries. They have been approved by the experts of the Council for the Polish Language with certain exceptions. The Council for the Polish Language experts believe that the Polish term for “qualifications framework” – *rama kwalifikacji* – already approved in Polish documents and materials, is linguistically and factually incorrect as translated from the English, and should be replaced with more appropriate wording, such as “the structure of qualifications’ levels” – *struktura poziomów kwalifikacji*. In addition, the Council for the Polish Language experts expressed the view that the terms “formal education”, “non-formal education” and “informal learning” have also been incorrectly translated from the English as *edukacja formalna*, *edukacja pozaformalna* and *uczenie się nieformalne*. Ultimately, until a more appropriate phrase is found, it was agreed to use the term “type 1 organised education” – *edukacja zorganizowana typu I* – for formal education. However, in the course of further consultations with representatives of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, it was decided to maintain the terms “formal education” – *edukacja formalna* – and “non-formal education” – *edukacja pozaformalna*.

No.	Term	Definition
1.	Credit accumulation	The process of collecting validated learning outcomes that comprise the components of the requirements for a given qualification.
2.	Certification	The process by which a learner receives a formal document from an authorised institution stating that a qualification has been attained. Certification occurs after validation.
3.	Formal education	Learning through participation in education and training programmes leading to the attainment of a registered qualification.
4.	Non-formal education	Institutionally organised learning which is not included in the education and training programmes that lead to the attainment of a registered qualification.
5.	Learning outcomes	The knowledge, skills and social competence attained in the learning process.
6.	European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF)	The EU-adopted structure of qualifications levels constituting a system for referencing national qualifications frameworks to enable qualifications attained in different countries to be compared.
7.	Social competence	The ability to shape one’s own development, as well as the autonomous and responsible participation in professional life and society, taking into account the ethical context of one’s own behaviour.
8.	National qualifications system (NQS)	The entire system of procedures for establishing and awarding qualifications and ensuring their quality.
9.	Registered qualification	A set of learning outcomes described in the Integrated Qualifications Register whose attainment is formally validated by an authorised institution. A qualification described in the register may be full or partial.

No.	Term	Definition
10.	Polish Qualifications Framework (PQF)	The description of the hierarchy of qualifications levels entered into the Integrated Qualifications Register in Poland.
11.	Credit transfer	The recognition by an entity awarding a qualification of learning outcomes constituting a component part of the said qualification, which were validated by other entities.
12.	Descriptor	A general description of the requirements relating to knowledge, skills or social competence corresponding to a given qualification level.
13.	Informal learning	The attainment of knowledge, skills and competence through a wide range of activities occurring outside of organised forms of learning.
14.	Skills	The ability to carry out tasks and solve problems relevant to a field of learning or professional activity.
15.	Recognition of qualifications	Formal recognition by an authorised institution of the validity of a certificate / diploma obtained abroad.
16.	Validation	The multi-stage process of ensuring that the competences required for a given qualification have been attained, regardless of the learning process. Validation leads to certification.
17.	Knowledge	A set of descriptions of facts, principles, theories and practices assimilated during the learning process, relating to a field of learning or professional activity.



Eduard Staudecker, expert from Austria, member of the EQF Advisory Group of the European Commission



The opinions of international experts

Aileen Ponton (Scotland)

What has been clear from the very start of the referencing process is just how much work has been going on in Poland in preparation for the development and implementation of the PQF itself. Major reforms have taken place between 2008 and 2011 and have focused in particular on legislation to support the introduction of a learning outcomes approach in general, vocational and higher education. This makes for substantial change in the curricula but also in the learning and teaching approaches required.

One of the key features of the PQF that makes it quite distinctive in European terms is the use of generic descriptors called universal descriptors, which are described in terms of knowledge, skills and competence, but then, in addition, second stage descriptors which relate these to general, vocational or higher education. Both of these types of descriptor also correspond to the EQF. In addition, it is also the intention to have some sector specific descriptors. In some ways, this use of three stages of level descriptor is linked to the major reforms identified above. As major changes to the curriculum took place prior to the PQF descriptors being finalised, the report itself indicates that this has proved quite difficult and that full harmonisation between curricula and the descriptors will require further work.

Michael Schopf (Germany)

First of all, the aims of the Polish Qualifications Framework are the „official“ ones, written down in the EQF recommendation, such as mobility, transparency, recognition in Europe and translation instrument.

(...) Totally new (also in the context of solutions in other member states) is the introduction of two versions of qualifications - full (large?) and partial (small?) qualifications. These partial qualifications are not comparable with parts of or additions to a qualification. Although during the next time, many questions will have to be answered as experience is gained in using the concept of two types of qualifications, the intention is positive: bring as many qualifications as possible into the “Integrated National Register”.

(...) A last remarkable decision is the intention to introduce credit point systems into all education areas – also in general education. This could become very useful if Poland wants to make the validation of non-formal and informal learning easier, to improve the permeability between the education areas and – generally speaking – to make the political intention of lifelong learning become reality for all of society.

Eduard Staudecker (Austria)

The report demonstrates awareness of key issues that might arise from implementing mechanisms for credit accumulation for specific sectors. Furthermore, extensive preparatory work is being undertaken, addressing the definition of criteria and procedures for including qualifications and assigning PQF levels, and the development of a legal basis. Implementation of these principles and their legal anchoring is seen as an important contribution towards transparency and credibility.

(...) Congruence between PQF and EQF level descriptors is demonstrated in a systematic and thorough manner. The introduction of ‘social competence’ descriptors is seen as a suitable measure to overcome the tight ‘competence’ definition used in the EQF tableau and will facilitate understanding of the competence category at the national level.

(...) In the future, special attention needs to be devoted to fostering cooperation with other countries at the regional level, as well as to the structure of the European labour market (especially and e.g. mobility of workers, economic cycle, shift to service industry, skills mismatch) in order to ensure the long-term benefits of the PQF for Polish citizens.

Erzsébet Szlamka (Hungary)

The aim, scope and therefore the type of the Polish Qualifications Framework are impressive: the Polish colleagues did not only reflect the education and training structure, but they initiated a fundamental change in the qualifications system. There were several pillars of the project: the renewal of the national qualifications register, the strengthening of quality assurance, credit transfer and the integration of informal and non-formal learning outcomes in the system. All these are fundamentally supported by the Polish Qualifications Framework, which – even though similarly to the European Qualifications Framework – has 8 levels, is not a simple copy: it is well adapted to Polish specifics.

(...) Communication about the PQF is worth mentioning: the wider public has been reached by conferences (including an annually organised conference where international guests were also welcome), a dedicated homepage, promotional materials including a widely understandable animation on how the qualifications framework operates, resulting in the awareness of the learning outcomes approach; the trio of knowledge, skills and competences; the transparent and flexible way of learning, etc. During the almost two years of cooperation between Polish and international experts, while the Polish referencing process was on-going, international experts could experience the more and more active participation of stakeholders.

The process and report are transparent, not only by clearly describing the Polish educational system. Though there are concepts used differently in Poland than in many other Member States, the terminology is explained and consistently used. Also, showing concrete qualifications with their learning outcomes helps both understanding and credibility.



International experts: (from left) Michael Schopf from Germany, Erzsébet Szlamka from Hungary and Aileen Ponton from Scotland

The referencing report is a document describing the Polish qualifications system and how the Polish Qualifications Framework is referenced to the European Qualifications Framework. The report was approved by the Committee for European Affairs of the Council of Ministers and then presented internationally.

The report describes the course and state of advancement of work on modernising the national qualifications system in Poland. It also shows that Poland fulfilled the ten referencing criteria developed by the European Qualifications Framework Advisory Group of the European Commission. The document includes information on: terminology, the learning outcomes required for selected qualifications as they relate to PQF level descriptors, a detailed description of the education system in Poland, as well as the opinions of international experts. The report has been written for both people in Poland involved in this field, as well as individuals and institutions from various countries engaged in implementing the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning.

It will now be possible to compare the qualifications awarded in Poland to those from other EU countries. This will promote the achievement of one, coherent EU labour market, where diplomas or certificates awarded in Poland will be understandable and transparent to employers of other European countries.

www.ibe.edu.pl

The Educational Research Institute (IBE) conducts interdisciplinary research on the functioning and effectiveness of the education system in Poland. The Institute participates in national and international research projects, prepares reports, expert opinions and serves in an advisory capacity.

IBE employs education researchers – sociologists, psychologists, educators, economists, political scientists and representatives of other academic disciplines – eminent specialists in their fields with diverse professional experience, not only in research but also in teaching, public administration and the activities of non-governmental organisations.

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).

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