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# **COUNTRY FACTSHEET**

## **POLAND**

D2.1 State of the Art Report

## Country Factsheet: Poland

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<b>Conceptual approaches and specific national /regional policies promoting transversal competences in validation and guidance processes:</b>	
<b>Situation in Poland</b>	<p>There are no national or regional systemic policies in Poland promoting specifically transversal competences as they are understood in the TRANSVAL-EU project. But there are national policies that can potentially support validation of such competences and their transfer between different qualification subsystems and qualifications themselves. They include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. attaining ‘market qualifications’ introduced by the Integrated Qualification System (IQS),</li> <li>2. confirming learning outcomes and ECTS within higher education,</li> <li>3. extramural examinations in general education and VET,</li> <li>4. vocational guidance as part of public activities promoting employment and supporting the labour market.</li> </ol> <p>The Integrated Qualification System (Zintegrowany System Kwalifikacji) is a national qualification system developed in Poland in accordance with the principles of the Council recommendation of 23 April 2008 on the European Qualifications Framework (Council of the European Union 2017). It was introduced with the adoption of the Act on the Integrated Qualifications System in December 2015 by the Polish parliament (IQS Act). The IQS Act establishes and defines, among other:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● the Polish Qualifications Framework (PQF),</li> <li>● the Integrated Qualifications Register (IQR);</li> <li>● a typology of qualifications and relevant terminology;</li> <li>● principles of describing and registering qualifications in the IQR, including validation requirements;</li> <li>● principles of quality assurance.</li> </ul> <p>As the name suggest, the IQS integrates several qualification subsystems functioning in Poland, including formal education (general, vocational and higher education) established by the acts on the Education System and Higher Education, as well as other state regulated qualifications defined by separate legal provisions, usually involving licencing (e.g. lawyer, nurse, driver’s licence). The system also introduced a new type of non-state regulated qualifications: the so-called ‘market qualifications’ that function on the labour market and are developed by training providers, corporations, social organisations, industry associations etc. This new type of qualifications can be formally included in the IQS provided they meet the conditions and successfully pass the procedure defined by the IQS Act.</p> <p>In practice, the integration of these subsystems means all qualifications mentioned above are referenced to the PQF, as well as included in the publicly available IQR. This happens by law in the case of qualifications from formal education, by the relevant minister’s choice in case of other state regulated qualifications, and upon request of a qualification developer and then a decision of a relevant minister in the case of market qualifications. Other than that, different types of qualifications maintain their legal identity, which translates into different arrangements for awarding them.</p>

Therefore, these arrangements will be described separately, beginning with market qualifications. Vocational guidance provided by public employment services are not part of the IQS.

### 1. Attaining 'market qualifications' introduced by the Integrated Qualification System (IQS)

According to the IQS Act, market qualifications have to be described in terms of learning outcomes and according to a predefined form, that also includes a section dedicated to validation requirements (stages of the process, methods used, competences of the staff conducting the process etc.). Learning outcomes are most commonly formulated with the use of Bloom's taxonomy and action verbs, although this is not formally required. While they are developed by various organisations, once a market qualification is included in the IQS it becomes public property and their awarding is supervised by relevant ministries.

Market qualifications are awarded as a result of the 'validation of learning outcomes' defined as:

*[validation is] assessing whether a person seeking to have a qualification awarded has attained a distinct part or all of the learning outcomes required for that qualification, regardless of the person's learning path. (IQS Act 2016, s. 1)*

It is worth noting that this definition does not include the identification and documentation stages and treats the certification stage as a separate process described as:

*the process by which a learner, after having achieved a positive validation result, receives a formal document from an authorised awarding body stating that a qualification has been awarded (IQS Act 2016, s. 1).*

Apart from validation of learning outcomes, the IQS Act also allows for the accumulation and transfer of 'achievements' that can be compared to non-numerical 'credits'. These achievements are defined as:

*...distinguished sets of learning outcomes whose attainment has been confirmed through validation, and are part of the requirements for a given market qualification (IQS Act 2016, s. 1).*

Accumulation of sets of learning outcomes means that they can be acquired and validated at different places and times. Their transfer is to be understood as the possibility to have them recognised as equivalent to the requirements for a different market qualification by an authorised awarding body. But it is up to the awarding body whether it will consider recognising sets of learning outcomes at all or in any given individual case.

Transferring learning outcomes is easier when they are part of another qualification included in the IQS, as this can be done on the basis of a document confirming they have already been awarded, that is a certificate issued after acquiring a market qualification. Such a process could be considered an 'automatic' transfer. Recognising learning outcomes other than those from an already awarded qualification included in the IQS is possible, but has to be based on an interview with

the person undergoing validation, as well as separate assessment of the documentation presented by this person to prove their achievements. Such a transfer is closer to a full validation process.

The arrangements presented above make it possible to include transversal competences described in terms of learning outcomes in any market qualification, accumulate them via validation and then transfer them 'between' these qualifications fairly easily. But it is worth noting, that as of today, market qualifications are rarely developed with transversal competences in mind. They are meant to be tailored to very specific needs of an industry or economic sector and as such tend to include mainly technical skills or occupation-specific skills (Markowska & Sobestjański 2020).

Furthermore, awarding bodies are not obligated to recognise sets of learning outcomes and their primary motive for offering validation is economic in nature. According to the IQS Act awarding bodies for market qualifications have to be entities conducting business activities, which is one of the requirements while applying for this role. As such, they can charge the candidates for validation regardless of its result and set the amount of the fee autonomically. These fees can be fairly significant and amount to ca. 330 EUR (Rostworowski 2020). There can also be more than one awarding body for a given market qualification. Therefore, while the market qualifications themselves are public property, the process of validation and certification for these type of qualifications is privatised. Competing awarding bodies are not prone to consider the formal possibility to develop sets of learning outcomes that can be utilised by their competition as well as transfer something that is part of a commercial service they offer, at least at this stage of the implementation of the IQS. The entities developing qualifications, as well as awarding bodies themselves, rarely consider including the identification and documentation stages as well as guidance as part of the validation process (Markowska & Sobestjański 2020).

Another factor to be considered when analysing the potential of these legal provisions in relation to transversal competences is the number of market qualifications developed by now. As of 31st of January 2022, 462 applications for including a market qualification have been submitted, of which 144 have been formally included in the system but only 92 can be considered as 'functioning' qualifications, that is qualifications that can be already awarded (have an awarding body and a quality assurance entity assigned). Furthermore most of the certificates issued comprise of only two qualifications: Programming and operation of the 3D printing process and Assembly of construction joinery, both of which are awarded by the same institution (VCC Foundation). For example in the 4th quarter of 2021 a total of 2544 market qualifications have been awarded, of which 578 is the first one and 454 – the second one mentioned above. Therefore the incentive to find links or common learning outcomes for market qualifications and provide the possibility to transfer them is yet scarce.

## **2. Gaining access to study programmes by confirming learning outcomes in higher education**

Since a 2014 amendment to the law on Higher Education, all higher education institutions in Poland must pass a resolution that specifies how the institution will provide access to study programmes on the basis of the validation of non-formal and informal learning, or more specifically 'confirmation of learning outcomes'. The

process must follow several general rules, one of which refers to the requirements a person must fulfil in order to apply for such a path. It is open to:

- *persons who have a secondary school diploma and at least five years of professional experience – when applying for a first cycle or a uniform master’s degree programme,*
- *persons who have a licentiate (“licencjat”) or equivalent degree and at least three years of professional experience after completing first cycle studies – when applying for a second cycle degree programme,*
- *persons who have a full qualification at level 5 of the Polish Qualifications Framework or a qualification referenced to level 5 of the European Qualifications Framework and was awarded by a foreign higher education system – when applying for a second cycle degree programme,*
- *persons who have a master’s degree (“magister”) or equivalent and at least two years of professional experience after completing the second cycle or uniform master’s degree studies – when applying for the next field of study in a first cycle or second cycle programme or a uniform master’s degree programme (Gmaj et al. 2019, p. 14)*

Furthermore, the process cannot grant the whole diploma, as no more than 50% of ECTS points assigned to a given education programme in a specific field, level and profile of studies may be awarded as the result of the validation. The number of students admitted this way cannot exceed 20% of the total number of students in a given field, level and profile of education as well (Gmaj et al. 2019, p. 14).

### **3. Extramural examinations in general education and VET**

As of 2008, it has been possible to obtain most qualifications awarded in general and vocational education by way of extramural examinations based on core curricula. Additionally, as a result of several amendments to the law on National Education implemented in the 2010s, the core curricula for general and vocational education have been described in terms of learning outcomes. These reforms were intended as a solution for adults who want to raise their level of qualifications without going back to school. Same as in the case of external examinations for regular students, the extramural examinations are organised by Regional Examination Boards (Okręgowe Komisje Egzaminacyjne), which are supervised by the Central Examination Board (Centralna Komisja Egzaminacyjna). The exams involve only the assessment stage in oral, written and - in VET - also practical form. Again, the learner must meet certain requirements in order to take these exams. The most important ones include:

- *In general education – for qualifications at the lower secondary and secondary school levels one must present a school leaving certificate from the previous school level or a document confirming promotion to the ultimate or penultimate year of school, including from schools for adults (Gmaj et al., p. 12);*
- *In VET – if an adult has completed lower secondary school or an eight-year primary school and attended out-of-school forms of education, e.g. a vocational qualifying course, the appropriate vocational examinations can be taken with regular students. If an adult worked in an occupation or attended a vocational school (or other form of education) to prepare for the relevant*

*qualification for at least two years, the examination may be taken extramurally (Gmaj et al. 2019, p. 13).*

The fees for taking extramural examinations are more affordable than in the case of market qualifications. In 2018 they amounted to ca. 40 EUR, and when the exam is re-taken, the fees become lower.

#### **4. Vocational guidance as part of public activities promoting employment and supporting the labour market**

Public employment services in Poland, regulated by the Act on Employment Promotion and Labor Market Institutions, are established by employment agencies together with county and regional labour offices. Vocational guidance consists in this case of providing assistance in choosing the right profession or place of work and in planning one's career development. Guidance counsellors provide:

- *information about occupations, the national and European labour market, training and education;*
- *counselling on the use of standardised methods of facilitating the choice of a profession, starting or changing jobs, including identifying one's learning outcomes, interests and professional talents;*
- *directing people to specialised psychological and medical exams to secure opinions on one's suitability for work in a profession or direction of training (Gmaj et al. 2019, p. 22).*

The most important principles of public employment services are:

- *accessibility;*
- *its voluntary nature;*
- *equal treatment;*
- *freedom to choose a profession and place of employment (Gmaj et al. 2019, p. 22).*

The guidance is free-of-charge, confidential and can be provided in an individual or group setting. The network of agencies is extensive - in 2016, there were 340 county labour offices and 16 regional labour offices with branches. Each regional labour office has a career information and planning centre, supporting the county labour offices in conducting vocational guidance, including the provision of remote counselling services using tele-information systems (Gmaj et al. 2019, p. 23).

Groups eligible to benefit from vocational guidance are:

- unemployed persons registered in labour offices,
- unregistered persons (eligible for a slightly narrower scope of services),
- national employers (eligible for assistance in selecting job candidates and conducting the professional development for their employees),
- persons not in employment, education or training (NEETs).

Users (Providers and beneficiaries) and uses (purposes) of validation of transversal competences	
<p><b>What type of organisations offer VNFIL for transversal competences and at which stages of guidance and validation processes?</b></p>	<p>There are no organisations offering specifically validation of transversal competences in Poland. Within the IQS, awarding bodies for market qualifications have the biggest potential to provide assessment of transversal competencies, although there are several barriers for that to take place (see section 1., point 1.). In higher education, individual institutions committed to offering access to their study programmes via validation of non-formal and informal learning could also be interested in incorporating transversal competences into their processes (see section 1., point 2.). Schools have little to offer in respect to validation of non-formal and informal learning in general, although they do incorporate transversal competences in their teaching programmes based on core curricula (see section 1., point 3.). Guidance counsellors, especially those working within the public employment services, do provide identification and documentation of transversal competencies, although do not use frameworks, tools or methodologies dedicated specifically to this notion.</p>
<p><b>General awareness: Are there national campaigns to promote VNFIL service? How and where people can find information on this service?</b></p>	<p>Awareness raising activities related to the validation of non-formal and informal learning are conducted as part of the promotion of the IQS in general by the minister coordinator of the system, that is the Minister of Education and Science, the Educational Research Institute tasked by the minister coordinator with supporting the implementation of the IQS, and by individual awarding bodies for market qualification promoting validation services they offer.</p>

Quality assurance	
<p><b>Are quality assurance arrangements focused on VNFIL process (and supporting the implementation of relevant national strategies) in place? Is a specific organisation in charge of conducting quality assurance?</b></p>	<p>This section is structured according to the description of the four main legal provisions and policies functioning in Poland related to validation of non-formal and informal learning.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>1. Attaining ‘market qualifications’ introduced by the Integrated Qualification System (IQS)</b></p> <p>The IQS includes internal and external quality assurance arrangements. Every awarding body for a market qualification must have an internal quality assurance system of validation and certification in place, which is then evaluated alongside other aspects as part of external quality assurance. The latter is conducted by institutions chosen to perform this task for a given market qualification by the relevant minister. These institutions are selected from a list of authorised external quality assurance entities. The list is managed by the minister coordinator of the IQS, who announces a call for accepting applications from institutions that would like to join this list at least once every three years. The relevant minister for a given qualification appoints an external quality assurance entity by signing an agreement. When choosing an entity, the minister takes into account the effectiveness and rationality of the use of existing resources and the principle of evenly dividing duties among the entities on the list. Additionally, a maximum of five entities from the list can be appointed as the external quality assurance entity for one market qualification. These institutions are required to cooperate in order to ensure a consistent standard of quality for the certification of a given market qualification. An external quality assurance entity can be an institution or individual conducting</p>

business activity that has at least 10 years of experience in conducting organised activities in a field of the economy, the labour market, in education or training. The entity cannot be an awarding body for the qualification whose quality it will be assessing and it must have an internal quality assurance system in place as well as adequately trained personnel (Gmaj et al. 2019, p. 35-35).

## **2. Gaining access to study programmes by confirming learning outcomes in higher education**

Higher education institutions are directly responsible for the quality of the awarded qualifications and the study programmes leading to them. They are legally required to operate an internal quality assurance system. The purpose of the external quality assurance system in higher education is primarily to verify the functioning of the internal one. (...) As part of the external quality assurance higher education institutions are required by law to be assessed ex ante and ex post by the Polish Accreditation Committee (Polska Komisja Akredytacyjna), which submits the results of its assessments to the Minister of Science and Higher Education. The Committee performs its activities in accordance with the Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (2015). Assessments can also be performed by institutions established by the academic community or by an international accreditation body (Gmaj et al. 2019, p. 32).

## **3. Extramural examinations in general education and VET**

Extramural examinations are supervised by the Central Examination Board. It's tasks include preparing examination materials, setting assessment guidelines, printing and distributing the materials and examination sheets, analysing examination results for the purpose of further research, and submitting reports on the aggregated results to the Minister of Education and Science on an annual basis. Detailed information about the organisation of examinations and necessary provisions, such as examination timetables, additional supplies or equipment, approved computer software or adaptations to the special needs of students, are updated annually and publicly available on the Central Examination Board's website. The Board prepares and publishes data from the examinations, which can be then used to evaluate the results and teaching effectiveness of a given school (e.g. by applying the educational value added method – EVA) (Gmaj et al. 2019, p. 31). Regional Education Authorities ensure compliance with these requirements.