

NQF state of play



Poland 2018

Table of contents

- Chapter 1 - Introduction and context
- Chapter 2 - Policy objectives
- Chapter 3 - Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications
- Chapter 4 - Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement
- Chapter 5 - Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways
- Chapter 6 - NQF implementation and impact
- Chapter 7 - Referencing to the EQF
- Chapter 8 - Important lessons and future plans
- Chapter 9 - Main sources of information
- Chapter 10 - National qualification framework (NQF)
- Chapter 11 - Acronyms
- Chapter 12 - References

Introduction and context

The Polish education and training system has been undergoing reform at all levels and the country performs well or is developing fast according to most EU benchmarks for 2020. Very few students leave education and training early (5.0% in 2017, compared to 10.6%, the EU average), and the high rate of participation in school is paralleled by a high rate of tertiary education attainment (45.7% in 2017, compared to the EU average of 39.9%). According to the 2015 OECD Programme for international student assessment (PISA), Polish students perform very well in reading, mathematics and science, with fewer underachievers in all three fields compared to EU averages. The employment rate of recent graduates is also above the EU average, at 82.1% in 2017. Among the areas for improvement are participation in early childhood education and care (93.1% in 2016, compared to the EU average of 95.3%), and participation of adults in lifelong learning (at 4.0% in 2017, it is far below the EU average of 10.9%) (European Commission, 2018). While participation in initial vocational education and training (IVET) is above the EU average, the sector has been faced with a number of challenges, including lack of flexible pathways, low quality of teaching and absence of a mechanism matching IVET supply with labour demand (European Commission, 2017). Comprehensive VET reform since December 2016 has introduced changes in training pathways, curricula, the financing system and improving employer involvement in VET (European Commission, 2018). A new regulation on core curricula for pre-school and primary schools was adopted in 2017, aiming to improve the quality of teaching in general education (European Commission, 2017), while the core curriculum for post-primary schools is also being reformed, with changes expected to be implemented starting with the 2019/20 school year. Reform aiming to increase the relevance of higher education for the labour market has also started, and a new Act on higher education and science was adopted in July 2018. Among other aspects, it foresees the division of universities into academic and professional schools and the creation of a new body for university governance, 'the university board' (European Commission, 2018).

Poland started developing a comprehensive national qualifications framework (NQF) – the Polish qualifications framework (PQF) – in 2008, building on and integrating the work on the qualifications framework for higher education linked to the Bologna process. The PQF is part of the integrated qualifications system (IQS), which aims to promote lifelong

learning and to support education, training and learning, responding to the needs of the labour market and society at large. The Act on the integrated qualifications system (IQS Act) was formally adopted by the Parliament on 22 December 2015 ([1]) and came into force in January 2016. It introduced a series of legislative changes through approximately 20 new or modified legal acts ([2]). The IQS consists of a number of different elements, the most important being the qualifications framework, the qualifications register and arrangements for quality assurance and validation of non-formal and informal learning.

The PQF has now reached an operational stage and is embedded in other legislation that regulates formal learning. It has eight learning-outcomes-based levels applicable to all Polish qualifications, from general education, vocational education and training (VET), higher education, and those outside the formal system, as long as they meet agreed quality criteria. The IQS Act regulates all aspects of inclusion of non-formal qualifications, and work is in progress to define administrative procedures and bodies in cooperation with stakeholders. All qualifications included in the IQS have an assigned PQF level, most of which are currently qualifications from formal education.

Level descriptors at three different levels of generality are used, in an effort to connect different sub-systems of education and training. Universal descriptors expressed in terms of knowledge, skills and social competence are the basis for the comprehensive PQF and act as a reference point for more specific descriptors: for the different subsystems, and for sectoral qualifications frameworks for economic sectors.

The PQF was referenced to the European qualifications framework (EQF) in May 2013 (Educational Research Institute, 2013).

Policy objectives

Work on the qualifications framework is an integral part of broad reform and modernisation of the Polish qualifications system, addressing all levels and all subsystems of education and training. An important part of this reform has been an overall shift to learning outcomes ([3]). This required redesign of all programmes, standards and curricula in general, vocational and higher education and training. The framework, through its focus on learning outcomes, is seen as an important instrument for strengthening the transparency and overall consistency of education and training, which is considered by some to be fragmented and difficult to navigate.

The further development and implementation of the integrated qualifications system are part of the *Strategy for human capital development*, adopted in 2013, which is currently being updated (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018), and also among the priorities outlined in the *Strategy for responsible development (Strategia na Rzecz Odpowiedzialnego Rozwoju, or Morawiecki Plan)* adopted in February 2017 (European Commission, 2017).

While some adjustments to the IQS Act are planned to improve the governance of the qualifications system, the original purpose of the PQF has not changed significantly since its creation (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018):

- a. to help integrate the various qualifications subsystems in Poland;
- b. to increase the accessibility to and quality of qualifications;
- c. to implement more effectively the policy for lifelong learning;
- d. to fulfil the Council recommendation on the EQF for lifelong learning;
- e. to fit into the wider context of developments in qualifications systems in Europe.

The direction chosen for the PQF has relevance in a wider European setting. First, the framework is seen as a tool for reform and change, its role going beyond merely describing existing qualifications. At present, this is applicable to the adult education sector. Second, the qualifications framework does not operate alone but is used extensively in combination with several other elements in a wider policy strategy. The impact of qualifications frameworks depends on their integration with other policy initiatives. Third, while the framework introduces a coherent set of

national levels and descriptors, it also identifies the need for additional learning outcomes descriptors to be used by subsystems and sectors, allowing for a more detailed fit-for-purpose approach.

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

The PQF has eight learning outcomes-based levels, covering all types of qualification available in the country provided they meet agreed quality criteria. Among other aspects, the IQS Act establishes the typology of qualifications, the principles of inclusion of qualifications in the qualifications register, and principles of quality assurance. Three types of qualification can be assigned a PQF level and included in the IQS, classified according to whether they refer to a level of formal education or not, and according to the legal basis that governs the process of awarding the qualification:

- a. type A: State-regulated qualifications within the formal education and training system (general education, VET and higher education);
- b. type B: State-regulated qualifications outside the formal education and training system;
- c. type C: non-regulated qualifications from the private sector (market qualifications).

A distinction is also made between full and partial qualifications; full qualifications are awarded exclusively within the formal system ([4]), where partial qualifications can also be awarded. All non-formal qualifications (both regulated and non-regulated) are considered partial qualifications.

Originally, the PQF was envisaged as a seven-level framework, closely matching existing qualifications and degrees in the Polish system; it was later decided to introduce a new level 5 in the framework, to allow for a more appropriate placing of short-cycle academic qualifications as well as advanced vocational qualifications, for example the master craftsman (*Meister*).

Levelling of some of the master craftsman qualifications was accompanied by vivid discussion on whether to place them at PQF level 4 or 5. The debate focused on how much weight should be given to learning outcomes associated with autonomy in running a business, leadership skills and tutoring skills required to become a master craftsman, in comparison to 'typical' vocational learning outcomes. The decision was taken to place each of the ten master craftsman qualifications at PQF

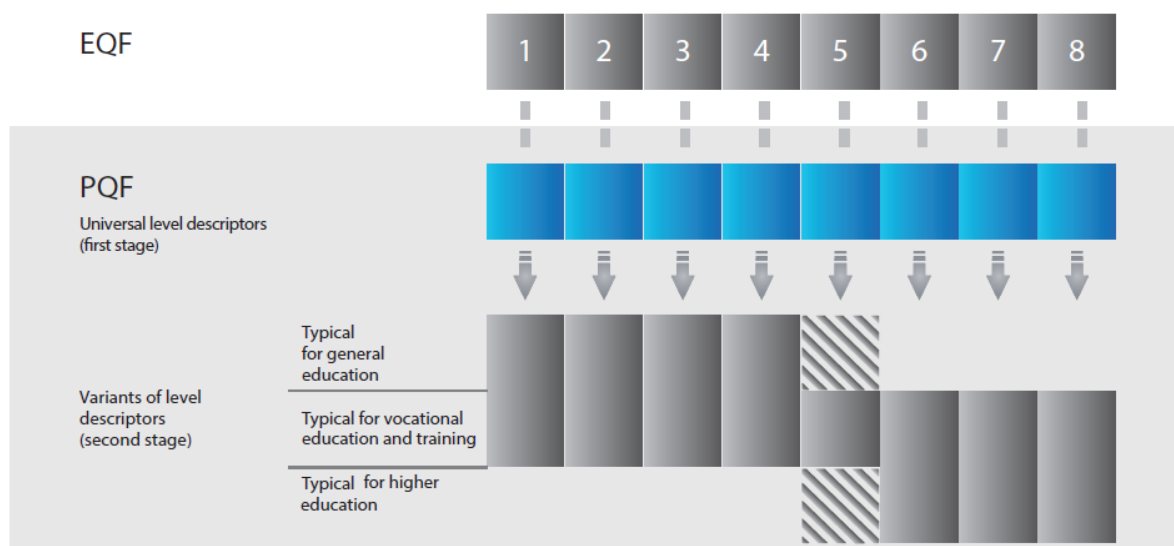
level 5. Challenges in terms of levelling have also been encountered with regard to diplomas awarded after post-graduate studies: so far three of these qualifications have been included into the IQS, with others rejected as qualification descriptions were found to be insufficient to allow levelling. Expert support is currently being provided to higher education institutions to improve qualification descriptions for post-graduate study programmes (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

Three main sets of level descriptors are included in the PQF, with different degrees of generality and for different purposes:

- a. universal descriptors (first stage); they are the most generic and form the basis for the comprehensive PQF;
- b. descriptors for the education and training subsystems and sub-frameworks (second stage): general, vocational and higher education;
- c. descriptors for sectoral qualifications frameworks (third stage, not indicated in Figure 1); these are developed with second stage descriptors as a basis.

The basic principles behind the three sets of PQF level descriptors are illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. **Structure of level descriptors in the PQF**



Source: Educational Research Institute, 2017.

The first stage (universal) learning outcomes descriptors developed for the PQF refer to the key learning domains in Figure 2. These descriptors are based on an agreement between stakeholders in general, vocational and higher education and are the common reference point for

developments at sector (second stage) and subsector (third stage) levels.

Figure 2. **First stage generic descriptors (universal)**

Knowledge	Scope
	Depth of knowledge
Skills	Problem-solving and applying knowledge in practice
	Learning
	Communication
Social competence	Identity
	Cooperation
	Responsibility

Source: Adapted from Educational Research Institute (2017).

Progress has been made in defining the second stage level descriptors for the different education and training subsystems (Educational Research Institute, 2017). The basic distinction between knowledge, skills and social competence is used, but the degree of specificity differs between subsystems. For example, the main descriptive categories of the level descriptors for general education and VET are specified as follows:

GENERAL EDUCATION (LEVELS 1 TO 4)

VET (LEVELS 1 TO 5)

Knowledge	
a. language and communication b. mathematics and natural sciences c. social functioning	a. theories/principles b. phenomena and processes c. organising work d. tools and materials
Skills	

a. language and communication b. mathematics and natural sciences c. social functioning d. learning	a. information b. organising work c. tools and materials d. learning and professional development
Social competence	
a. language and communication b. health and the environment c. social functioning	a. following rules b. cooperation c. responsibility

While the coexistence of several qualifications sub-frameworks is common in most European countries, the PQF takes a step further and attempts to make these explicit within an overarching conceptual approach based on learning outcomes. For instance, the IQS Act brings the requirements for non-formal qualifications in line with those for qualifications from the formal general, vocational and higher education systems by having them based on learning outcomes, setting a standard for the manner of describing qualifications, requiring a process of validation and certification, as well as internal and external quality assurance systems (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018). When, for example, the financial sector wanted to establish a specialised sectoral qualifications framework, it used learning outcomes descriptors clearly connected to the level descriptors operating at other levels of generality (including the EQF level descriptors). By moving beyond the general, national level descriptors, the PQF is better able to link to the reform of standards and curriculum development and eventually to learning and assessment.

Progress can be observed in the overall shift to learning outcomes in Polish education and training. Core curricula, formulated in terms of learning outcomes, were introduced for all the main parts of education and training. The core curriculum for general education was gradually implemented from the 2009/10 school year and a new core curriculum was introduced starting with the 2017/18 school year. The core curriculum for vocational education was used from the 2012/13 school year; a new version, taking into account not only detailed learning

outcomes but also the criteria for verifying these outcomes, will apply starting with school year 2019/20. In both general education and VET the core curriculum forms the basis for assessment criteria. Amendments to the Act on Higher Education in 2011 ([5]) defined 'learning outcomes' and required all study programmes and resulting qualifications to be described in terms of learning outcomes as of the 2012/13 academic year, in compliance with the NQF for higher education. Learning outcomes were defined in eight broad areas of study. A 2016 regulation of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education ([6]) replaced the notion of learning outcomes in individual areas with the concept of 'qualification characteristics' or 'descriptions' ([7]) in full accordance with the IQS. These developments were aimed at promoting lifelong learning and recognition of learning acquired outside the formal system (European Commission et al.; forthcoming). To reduce bureaucratic burdens, a new regulation on the characteristics of levels 6 to 8 of the PQF was adopted in 2018 ([8]). This no longer defines specific learning outcomes for the eight broad areas of studies for two reasons: first, because the new Act on Higher Education and science introduced a new classification for the science and technology field, based largely on the OECD classification ([9]); second, the qualification characteristics are more general and refer to the three levels of the PQF. The only exception is in the arts, where the field is considered specific enough as to have its own set of qualification characteristics.

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

In 2010, an interministerial taskforce for lifelong learning was set up to provide overall coordination and monitoring of Polish lifelong learning policy implementation, including the national qualifications framework and register. Chaired by the Minister of National Education, it included the Ministers of Higher Education and Science, Economy, Labour and Social Policy, Regional Development, Foreign Affairs, and the Head of the Chancellery of the Prime Minister. To monitor the development and implementation of the PQF in this initial phase, an NQF steering committee was created as a sub-team of and reporting to the interministerial taskforce (the interministerial team for lifelong learning and the integrated qualification system). It was coordinated by the Ministry of Higher Education and Science, and included representatives from several ministries ([10]). Other stakeholders, such as representatives of education institutions, associations of territorial government, employer organisations and trade unions, could take part in an advisory capacity. The Educational Research Institute (IBE) was tasked to provide technical and conceptual support to the work of the steering committee and to prepare comprehensive proposals for developing the integrated qualifications system and its components. At the same time, the Bureau for Academic Recognition and International Exchange (under the Ministry of Higher Education and Science) was appointed as EQF national coordination point (EQF NCP) and it maintained this function to 2016. Since October 2016, the Minister of National Education is the EQF NCP.

Unlike many other countries, the above bodies have not directly included representatives of social partners or civil society. Seen from the outside and compared to other countries, Polish developments can be described as a combination of top-down and research-driven. However, two broad consultations have been carried out since 2011 and many meetings (more than 200) have been organised across the country addressing a wide range of stakeholders. In this way, representatives of education (both formal and non-formal) as well as worker and employer organisations were actively involved in and consulted on preparatory activities and solutions which came into force with the IQS Act in 2015 ([11]).

Formal adoption of the framework in 2015, with the Act on the integrated

qualifications system – the IQS Act ([12]) – clarified how the coordination of the qualifications system (including the framework) was to be carried out in the further development and implementation stages. The Ministry of National Education is responsible for overall coordination. The IQS Stakeholder Council was set up in September 2016 as an advisory and consultative body. The council consists of representatives of education and training providers, employers, trade unions, associations of higher education institutions, commercial training institutions, local governments, representatives of learners, and the central administration (Ministry of National Education and the Central Examination Board). Its role is to advise on operation, to monitor implementation, and to determine the direction of IQS-related developments, ensuring coherence of the solutions chosen. Its responsibilities include (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018):

- a. monitoring the functioning of the IQS and proposing improvements;
- b. advising on draft regulations related to the IQS;
- c. giving expert opinions on the PQF level for regulated and market qualifications to be included into the IQS;
- d. advising on proposals to include sectoral qualifications frameworks in the IQS.

The interministerial team for lifelong learning and the integrated qualification system continue to operate, monitoring IQS implementation.

The Educational Research Institute (IBE) continues to play a key role in the qualifications system and framework, supporting the ministry with technical and organisational solutions and monitoring implementation. At present, the IBE has been nominated to support and coordinate the development and inclusion in the IQS of qualifications attained outside formal education. The IBE is also responsible for operating the integrated qualifications register and for entering the qualifications included in the IQS into the register.

Sectoral skills councils consisting of representatives of employers, employees, and sectoral public institutions have also been established since 2016; to date these cover tourism, banking, construction, health, IT, fashion, and the automotive industry. They facilitate dialogue between education and the economy, acting as a forum to discuss sector needs and how skills acquired in schools, universities, and training courses respond to the needs of employers. One of the main goals of the sector skills councils is to develop sectoral qualifications frameworks, as an extension of the PQF for specific sectors. To date (December 2018), there

are sectoral qualifications frameworks for tourism and sports, and draft frameworks have been proposed for banking, construction, IT, telecommunications, development services ([13]), the fashion industry, public health and trade (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018). The decision to link a sectoral qualifications framework to the IQS is made by the minister of national education, at the request of the minister responsible for the sector.

Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

[14]

A key element of the Polish integrated qualifications system is the introduction of a more consistent and quality-assured approach to validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL). Overarching measures were introduced to integrate existing validation arrangements, while specific validation procedures for each education level are adjusted individually. The aim is to increase the flexibility of the education and training system and make it possible to acquire qualifications in different settings and throughout life. The main driver, common for all sectors, is to improve the response of education to labour market needs, particularly in the context of ever-changing demand for skills. It also aims to empower adults by encouraging them to valorise learning obtained at work and throughout life, an aspect which is particularly important given the relatively low participation in adult learning in Poland. The learning-outcomes-based PQF provides a reference point for this approach, signalling that qualifications at all levels can be acquired not only through formal education and training but also through non-formal and informal learning.

The IQS Act introduced a formal definition of validation, as 'an assessment whether a person applying for the award of a specific qualification achieved a part or all of the learning outcomes required for the given qualification, regardless of how the learning was acquired' ([15]) (Parliament of Poland, 2015). Validation in Poland covers all four stages outlined in the 2012 Council recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (identification, documentation, assessment and certification), though certification is treated as a distinct process since separate institutions can be responsible for validation and certification. The IQS Act and its implementing legislation specify the requirements for bodies carrying out validation and certification, the regulations for obtaining the permit to carry out certification, the principles for quality assurance in validation and certification, the scope of information collected in the national qualifications register, procedures for comparing learning outcomes for qualifications with PQF characteristics, and the rules for monitoring processes.

In general education and VET the possibility of acquiring qualifications via

validation of non-formal and informal learning is guaranteed by law. Since 2012, general education qualifications (confirming primary and upper secondary level, and basic and upper secondary vocational education levels for general education in vocational schools) can be attained on the basis of 'extramural examinations' that can be taken by adults without the obligation to return to school. Both initial and continuous vocational qualifications can be obtained by passing external examinations to validate professional knowledge and skills acquired in the workplace. In higher education there is a possibility of recognition of prior learning as an alternative path to gaining entry to a programme of study or to shorten the time spent studying a programme. Up to 50% of ECTS credits can be gained in this way, following verification of knowledge and skills developed through work experience; there is, however, a limit (20%) to the total number of students in a given programme, level and profile of study that can undergo VNFIL. In both VET and higher education, certain conditions have to be met with regard to the level of education attained and the number of years and the type of professional experience required. There are also conditions that higher education institutions have to meet to be able to carry out validation procedures (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

For non-formal qualifications included in the IQS, general arrangements for validation are a mandatory component of the description of each qualification, alongside learning outcomes and verification criteria. Each qualification may be awarded by multiple awarding bodies, which can cooperate with subcontractors organising the identification, documentation and verification stages of validation. The IQS does not impose a single model for carrying out validation to be used across the board: each qualification has its own requirements for validation and each awarding body has certain freedom in deciding on the exact course of the process and in creating its own validation tools (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

Since the adoption of the IQS Act, stakeholders have been supported in developing arrangements for validation by the Ministry of National Education and the Educational Research Institute, mainly via knowledge dissemination and direct cooperation. Between 2015 and 2018 more than 40 institutions were directly supported either at the stage of developing new qualifications or in creating specific procedures for validation. A number of publications and digital tools supporting VNFIL were developed by the Educational Research Institute ([16]).

Some of the challenges encountered in implementing VNFIL in Poland

include the relatively slow and complex process of including qualifications in the qualifications register and limited interest in validating skills acquired outside the regulated areas. These are linked to a learning culture in which formal learning was dominant, as well as the novelty of the IQS. As VNFIL arrangements have only recently started to be implemented, data on their effectiveness and impact are not yet available.

NQF implementation and impact

The comprehensive PQF has been established on a strong conceptual, legal and technical base and is now at an operational stage. Along with the adoption of the framework, the IQS Act ([17]) established the integrated qualifications register ([18]), coordination of the IQS and the role of stakeholders, a typology of qualifications and the related terminology, principles for quality assurance ([19]) and principles for the inclusion of qualifications (including non-formal qualifications) in the IQS ([20]). A revision of the IQS Act is planned for 2019, aimed at improving the governance of the qualifications system.

Different elements of the system were implemented gradually. Qualifications in the formal education system were assigned to PQF levels in a first phase, based on learning outcomes that had been already defined and adopted through legislation governing the formal education subsystems. For statutory and non-statutory (market) qualifications awarded outside the formal education system, inclusion in the register is decided by the competent minister for that qualification; in the latter case this follows a request made by the awarding body. To date, 9648 qualifications have been included in the register ([21]), most of which are formal qualifications from general education, VET, and higher education. PQF levels are indicated in the qualifications register and on all formal qualifications included. Work is in progress to indicate EQF levels as well. Both PQF and EQF levels are indicated on Europass certificate and diploma supplements.

The focus in the current phase of implementation is on the development, levelling and inclusion of non-formal qualifications in the IQS. This is a lengthy process involving extensive consultation with stakeholders and requiring mechanisms and tools to increase efficiency of inclusion procedures without sacrificing quality. Between 2016 and 2018, the Educational Research Institute supported the development of 100 market qualifications in line with the principles that govern all qualifications included in the IQS (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018). A new two-year project that started in January 2018 aims to integrate innovative and socially needed qualifications into the IQS, and to reduce barriers to IQS development by supporting stakeholders at national and regional level (European Commission et al., forthcoming). The implementation schedule of the IQS project foresees the inclusion in the register of 200 market qualifications by 2023, with a mid-term target of 40 qualifications

by the end of 2018; at this point 41 market qualifications had been included in the register, achieving the mid-term target, with many others at various stages of evaluation.

Two lines of research have been distinguished as relevant for the current stage of development and implementation of the PQF: studies on the functioning of particular structures in the system, the links between them and the assessment of processes in the IQS; and context research. The Educational Research Institute has conducted three studies that were completed in 2018 (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018):

- a. *Evaluation of the process of including qualifications in IQS* assessing the efficiency and complexity of the process of including market qualifications in the IQS;
- b. *Case studies of external quality assurance providers*, aiming to gain knowledge about the potential of institutions that will play the role of external quality assurance institutions (EQAI) in the process of awarding qualifications included in the IQS;
- c. *Research of the regional demand for support in the implementation and development of the IQS*, looking to identify the needs of particular groups of stakeholders and users of the IQS at regional level and to define the scope and forms of support needed.

The results of these studies are currently being analysed and the conclusions will be taken into account in the revision of the IQS Act in 2019.

The PQF has been communicated and promoted in Poland as part of, and along with, the entire integrated qualifications system. So far, the communication strategy has focused on disseminating knowledge and building awareness about the IQS, on communicating the benefits for both stakeholders and beneficiaries, and on encouraging potential stakeholders to join in activities to develop the system. Indirectly, it is also aimed at promoting the concept of lifelong learning in the context of the IQS and the PQF; to develop awareness in society of how career pathways can be perceived, of the approach to attaining qualifications, and of expectations about the education system; and to introduce a new language when speaking about qualifications. The main channels for communicating information about the PQF have been the IQS Portal, which was launched together with the integrated qualifications register in July 2016 ([22]), the website of the EQF NCP ([23]), public relations activities, seminars, conferences, debates, participation in industry events, publications and media materials. At present, communication

efforts are mainly directed at stakeholders who are or can be involved in the development of the IQS (industry organisations, employers, sector councils, education and training providers, and the public administration); the general public will be targeted at a later stage. Currently, awareness of the PQF is highest among education and training providers, pupils, students and parents involved in the formal education system, the public employment services and the vocational counsellors employed by these services. The framework is less known among job-seekers and employers.

Referencing to the EQF

The PQF for lifelong learning was referenced to the EQF in 2013; the *Referencing report* is available on the EQF portal ([24]). A separate *Self-certification report of the national qualifications framework for higher education* ([25]) to the QF-EHEA was prepared at the same time. An update on PQF developments in the country was presented to the EQF advisory group in December 2016, focusing on important developments in preceding years: adoption of the IQS Act, establishment of the integrated qualifications register, fine-tuning the governance structure, the typology of qualifications, and development of methods for levelling, describing and validation of qualifications.

An updated referencing report is expected to be presented in 2020, to reflect recent changes in the Polish education system. It will cover the amendment to the IQS Act planned for the second half of 2019 and the results of the completed second stage of IQS implementation (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

Important lessons and future plans

The PQF has now reached an operational stage and is well placed – conceptually, legally and technically – to become a visible part of the Polish education and training system, fully integrated with related policies and instruments in the IQS. This requires the extensive work carried out since 2010 to be followed up by sufficient political and stakeholder commitment and resources.

PQF developments aim to combine the introduction of a comprehensive national framework with the parallel development of sector and subsector frameworks. While the coexistence of frameworks at different levels and for different purposes can be found in many countries, the Polish approach tries to introduce conceptual coherence, allowing for synergies between frameworks at different levels and in different sectors. Practical implementation of the PQF may provide a model for other countries struggling to find ways to bridge and connect education and training sectors and subsectors. Whether this complex model will work in practice, and how it can promote consistent use of learning outcomes across levels, subsystems and sectors, must be monitored in the coming period.

Implementation of the PQF as part of the IQS has been the main mechanism integrating changes introduced in the general, vocational, and higher education sectors. Prior to this, the Polish qualifications system had been centred on standards and criteria addressing the formal education process, defined by content of education and years of formal learning (European Commission et al. 2019). The progress made in introducing the learning outcomes approach in the different subsectors of education and training provides a good basis for future developments. It also supports the development of qualifications obtained outside the formal system and their inclusion in the IQS, which is currently the main focus of implementation work. The implementation of the framework and the use of the common language of learning outcomes have also had a significant impact on cooperation between stakeholders, such as between employers and the VET sector – a key point of the VET reform – and cooperation in the context of the sectoral skills councils. PQF level 5 is considered to be the meeting area of qualifications providers from all education and training subsystems. Steps were taken to establish principles for quality assurance of qualifications and validation of non-formal and informal learning, and to support stakeholders involved with these process. The establishment of the IQS Stakeholders Council in 2016

has been an important measure aimed at ensuring coherence and direction for PQF-related developments, involving a wide range of stakeholders (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

Some of the challenges encountered so far include initial scepticism about the PQF and the EQF among stakeholders and, more recently, the challenge of including non-formal qualifications in the IQS; this is a lengthy process involving extensive consultation with stakeholders and requiring adequate mechanisms and tools to increase efficiency of inclusion procedures without sacrificing quality (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018). Given the variety and inconsistency of legal and organisational solutions for non-formal qualifications, comparing the value of qualifications acquired in different areas and awarded by different institutions according to their own criteria and procedures has proved difficult (European Commission et al. forthcoming).

Another challenge has been a lack of interest among non-formal learning providers, in particular international companies providing worldwide recognised training, in including their qualifications in the IQS. Qualifications in the IQS are open to bodies who want to become certifying institutions, and learning outcomes and validation processes become available in the public domain. As a result, any company may become a certifying institution after meeting specified standards and being approved by the relevant ministry; hence, the learning provider that applies for inclusion of its qualification into the IQS would no longer own the qualification once it is included (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

In addition to the development and inclusion of non-formal qualifications in the IQS, future steps in the implementation of the PQF include amendment of the IQS Act, planned for the second part of 2019 aiming to further fine-tune IQS governance, and the establishment of sectoral skills councils and sectoral qualifications frameworks for new sectors.

Main sources of information

- The Unit of Strategy and Integrated Qualifications System (in the Department of Strategy, Qualifications and Vocational Education) of the Ministry of National Education acts as EQF NCP:
<http://prk.men.gov.pl/en/7en/>
- IQF portal: <http://kwalifikacje.edu.pl/>
- The integrated qualifications register:
<https://rejestr.kwalifikacje.gov.pl/en/>
- Educational Research Institute (2013). *Referencing the Polish qualifications framework for lifelong learning to the European qualifications framework*. Warsaw: Educational Research Institute.
<https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-eqf/files/Polish%20Referencing%20Report.pdf>
- Educational Research Institute (2014). *Self-certification report of the national qualifications framework for higher education*. Warsaw: Educational Research Institute. http://biblioteka-krk.ibe.edu.pl/opac_css/doc_num.php?explnum_id=702

National qualification framework (NQF)

NQF LEVEL	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVEL
8	PhD Diploma (Dyplom doktora) Category Qualifications from the formal education system Post-graduate qualification (Świadectwo ukończenia studiów podyplomowych) Category Qualifications from the formal education system	8
7	Second cycle of higher education diploma (Master) (Dyplom ukończenia studiów drugiego stopnia) Category Qualifications from the formal education system Integrated first and second cycle diploma (Dyplom ukończenia jednolitych studiów magisterskich) Category Qualifications from the formal education system Post-graduate qualification (Świadectwo ukończenia studiów podyplomowych) Category Qualifications from the formal education system	7
6	First cycle of higher education diploma (Bachelor) (Dyplom ukończenia studiów pierwszego stopnia) Category Qualifications from the formal education system Post-graduate qualification (Świadectwo ukończenia studiów podyplomowych) Category Qualifications from the formal education system	6

Certificate of professional competence in the profession (Dyplom potwierdzający kwalifikacje zawodowe)

Category

Qualifications from the formal education system

Certificate of professional qualification in the profession (Świadectwo potwierdzające kwalifikację w zawodzie)

Category

Qualifications from the formal education system

Certified specialist diploma - short cycle (Świadectwo dyplomowanego specjalisty/specialisty technologa)

Category

Qualifications from the formal education system

Not yet available, but officially possible according to the 2018 Law on Higher Education.

Regulated and non-statutory qualifications (*)

E.g. Planning, creating and distributing content marketing (Tworzenie oferty, planowanie i prowadzenie sprzedaży skierowanej do klientów biznesowych – handlowiec)

Carpenter – master craftsman diploma (Stolarz – dyplom mistrzowski)

Furniture carpenter – master craftsman diploma (Stolarz meblowy – dyplom mistrzowski)

Confectioner - master diploma (Cukiernik – dyplom mistrzowski)

(*) These are State-regulated qualifications awarded outside the formal education and training system and non-regulated qualifications from the private sector (market qualifications) that have a PQF level assigned and have been included in the integrated qualification system (IQS) and the integrated qualification register.

Upper secondary school leaving certificate (Matura) (Świadectwo dojrzałości)

Category

Qualifications from the formal education system

Certificate of professional competence in the profession (Dyplom potwierdzający kwalifikacje zawodowe)

Category

Qualifications from the formal education system

Certificate of professional qualification in the profession (Świadectwo potwierdzające kwalifikację w zawodzie)

Category

Qualifications from the formal education system

Regulated and non-statutory qualifications (*)

E.g. Designing computer graphics (Projektowanie grafiki komputerowej)

Designing websites (Tworzenie witryn internetowych)

(*) These are State-regulated qualifications awarded outside the formal education and training system and non-regulated qualifications from the private sector (market qualifications) that have a PQF level assigned and have been included in the integrated qualification system (IQS) and the integrated qualification register.

Certificate of professional competence in the profession (Dyplom potwierdzający kwalifikacje zawodowe)

Category

Qualifications from the formal education system

Certificate of professional qualification in the profession (Świadectwo potwierdzające kwalifikację w zawodzie)

Category

Qualifications from the formal education system

Regulated and non-statutory qualifications (*)

E.g. Assembly of construction woodwork (Montowanie stolarki budowlanej)

Programming and servicing 3D printing
(Programowanie i obsługiwanie procesu druku 3D)

Preparing food in accordance with market trends and the principles of healthy nutrition (Przygotowywanie potraw zgodnie z trendami rynkowymi i zasadami zdrowego żywienia)

Auto body painter - journeyman certificate (Lakiernik samochodowy – świadectwo czeladnicze)

(*) These are State-regulated qualifications awarded outside the formal education and training system and non-regulated qualifications from the private sector (market qualifications) that have a PQF level assigned and have been included in the integrated qualification system (IQS) and the integrated qualification register.

Lower secondary school leaving certificate (Świadectwo ukończenia gimnazjum)

Category

Qualifications from the formal education system

According to the 2017 reform, lower secondary schools are being phased out; the last group of pupils from these schools will graduate in June 2019; pupils graduating from grade 6 of primary school continue education in grade 7 of 8-year primary schools.

Certificate of professional competence in the profession (Dyplom potwierdzający kwalifikacje zawodowe)

Category

Qualifications from the formal education system

Certificate of professional qualification in the profession (Świadectwo potwierdzające kwalifikację w zawodzie)

Category

Qualifications from the formal education system

Primary school leaving certificate (8 years) (Świadectwo ukończenia szkoły podstawowej (8-letniej))

Category

Qualifications from the formal education system

According to the 2017 reform, lower secondary schools are being phased out; the last group of pupils from these schools will graduate in June 2019; pupils graduating from grade 6 of primary school continue education in grade 7 of 8-year primary schools.

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Primary school leaving certificate (6 years)
(Świadectwo ukończenia szkoły podstawowej (6-letniej))

Category

Qualifications from the formal education system

According to the 2017 reform, lower secondary schools are being phased out; the last group of pupils from these schools will graduate in June 2019; pupils graduating from grade 6 of primary school continue education in grade 7 of 8-year primary schools.

1

Acronyms

CVET	continuing vocational education and training
ECTS	European credit transfer and accumulation system
EQF	European qualifications framework
EQF NCP	EQF national coordination point
IBE	Educational Research Institute [<i>Instytut Badań Edukacyjnych</i>]
IQS	integrated qualifications system
IVET	initial vocational education and training
NQF	national qualifications framework
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PISA	Programme for international student assessment
PQF	Polish qualifications framework
QF- EHEA	qualifications framework for the European higher education area
VET	vocational education and training
VNFIL	validation of non-formal and informal learning

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