

European Inventory on Validation of Non- formal and Informal Learning 2010

Country Report: Poland

By Aleksandra Duda

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1 INTRODUCTION

This country report is one of the final outputs of the 2010 update to the European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning. It has been prepared by a national country expert but has also been 'quality assured' by key stakeholders from the country. The update has been based on a number of key steps:

1. Existing information from the 2007 Inventory country report has been restructured and checked against other European and international sources through desk research;
2. In-country desk research has been carried out to provide a further update on developments since 2007;
3. Up to three interviews with stakeholders have been carried out and / or information has been collected via e-mail correspondence with relevant stakeholders.

The following quality assurance process has also been carried out and the report has been amended in line with relevant comments / feedback:

1. Internal quality checks on the language / style of the report have been carried out by the core GHK team.
2. Internal quality checks on the content have been carried out by the core GHK team;
3. External quality checks have been requested from up to three relevant stakeholders;
4. The report has been revised in line with comments / feedback from the above checks, then published on the Inventory website;
5. Feedback submitted via the website will be verified through desk research / consultation with relevant QA contacts and where appropriate, further updates will be made.

2 NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

2.1 National legal framework, system or policy on validation

In Poland, one cannot yet speak of a system of validation and recognition of learning outcomes acquired through informal learning or non-formal learning processes. The current legal framework in the field of education does not define the concept of validation and thus there are no regulations at central level addressing validation of learning outcomes achieved in a mode other than formal education. Exams and certificates confirm the acquisition of knowledge within the framework of formal education, understood as school and university education, and non-formal learning, understood as learning through courses and other forms of training.¹ As such, this report provides information on the plans in place to work towards the introduction of a system of validation, the educational infrastructure in place to support this and the provision of non-formal training in Poland.

The Polish learning culture remains dominated by learning in a formal context, where formal qualifications verified on the basis of examinations are still preferred. The prevailing presumption in the current system is that only the completion of an education or training cycle can provide knowledge and skills that allow the participant to be awarded a certificate confirming his or her competences. In consequence, the underestimated value of practical, especially non-formal and informal training creates one of the key obstacles for increasing the current low work supply among people under the age of 25 and those who are 45 and older.² This is further confirmed by official results in reaching European benchmarks for 2010 that are to guide progress on the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme.³ Although Poland has relatively easily reached the values established for four (out of five) benchmarks for the development of education in Europe, the rate for non-formal adult education still remains low compared to the EU average.⁴

This is one of the reasons why the importance of the validation of informal and non-formal learning outcomes is gaining recognition in Poland. The legal environment has been gradually adjusting to meet the demands in this respect and different aspects of non-formal education are regulated by separate legislation:

- the Act of 27 June 2003 amending the Educational System Act;
- Regulation of the Minister of National Education and Sport on accreditation of centres providing continuing education in out-of-school forms of 20 December 2003;
- Regulation of the Minister of Education and Science of 3 February 2006 on arrangements for adults acquiring and broadening general knowledge, professional or vocational skills and qualifications in non-school settings;

¹ Non-formal learning is understood here as intentional on the part of a learner but not provided by an education and training institution representing the established formal education system. Informal learning, in turn, is a non-structured learning process that results from everyday activities and experience related to work (but outside formal and non-formal job training), family life or leisure, usually unintentional on the part of the learner (based on definitions proposed by the European Commission, Okoń W. in New pedagogical dictionary and European Funds Portal).

² Diagnosis of the Poland 2030 Report, http://www.mlodziej.org.pl/s/p/aktualnosci/45/455/Stanislaw_Drzadzewski_3.pdf

³ Participation of adults (25-64) in non-formal and informal learning is one of five indicators in the field of education and training, which reflects Member States' performance in reaching the Lisbon Strategy objectives. Accordingly, the validation of non-formal and informal learning constitutes a key element of the EU's actions to support education and training.

⁴ For instance, the rate reached 4.4% in 2004, 5% in 2005, 4.9% in 2006, 4.7% in 2007 - 5.1%, and 5.2% in 2009.⁴ In comparison, the corresponding average for the European Union in 2006 - 2009 oscillates around 12% (GUS, The economic activity of Poland's population, II quarter 2009, Warsaw 2009, p. 89)

- the Act on Promotion of Employment and Institutions of the Labour Market of 20 April 2004; with subsequent amendments;
- the Act on economic activity freedom of 2 July 2004; with subsequent amendments; and
- the Labour Code of 26 June 1974, with subsequent amendments.

In particular, the legislation from 2006 adopted specific arrangements whereby professional/vocational skills acquired through employment can be validated through qualification examinations. The new regulation also introduced mechanisms for awarding partial qualifications in recognition of competences obtained as a result of completing training in a non-school setting, and for recognising partial qualifications obtained in this way by adults who take up study in schools for adults providing vocational education and training.⁵

The Polish authorities (i.e. the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Ministry of Science and Higher Education, Ministry of Economy and the Prime Minister's office) attach a growing importance to both a lifelong learning approach to education and an approach based on learning outcomes. This means a departure from the traditional way of carrying out examinations in institutions of formal education that were focused not on skills that a student should acquire as a result of the education process (in relation to the established standard) but on a lecture programme (teacher-oriented approach).⁶ This shift is best demonstrated by current work on a new strategic document, the 'Perspective of lifelong learning', being prepared by an interdepartmental team of experts. Its main aim is to highlight the two dimensions of lifelong learning (taking account of the potential of non-formal and informal learning) as well as the learning outcomes (indicating the need for assessment and recognition of competences as learning outcomes, irrespective of the method, place and time of their acquisition).⁷

A number of other policy documents also refer to the objective needs in establishing a system of validation of informal and non-formal learning. These include:

- The Human Capital Operational Programme 2007-2013;
- The [Strategy for Development of Education 2007-2013](#), adopted by the Government in 2005, underlines the necessity of creating a system for recognising and validating competencies acquired outside of the formal school system;
- The *Strategy for Development of Continuing Education (2003-2010)* targets the implementation of numerous elements which are vital for the system and recognises 'the necessity of building a more human-friendly system of access to all levels, forms and methods of gaining knowledge and developing skills';⁸
- The *Sectoral Operational Programme for the Development of Human Resources* for the years 2004-2006 aimed to strengthen the system of continuing education

⁵ Ministry of National Education (2009), The 2009 Polish National Report on the Implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Programme: Work Programme, p.6. http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/natreport09/poland_en.pdf

⁶ Wyróżębski, P., Approach to creating curricula based on learning outcomes (*Podejście do tworzenia programów nauczania oparte na efektach kształcenia*), e-mentor, No 3/2009, http://www.e-mentor.edu.pl/30,651,Podejscie_do_tworzenia_programow_nauczania_oparte_na_efektach_ksztalcenia.html

⁷ Ministry of National Education (2009) The 2009 Polish National Report on the Implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Programme.

⁸ Cedefop (2008) Poland: Overview of the Vocational Education and Training System, eKnowVet – Thematic Overviews, available at: http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/etv/Information_resources/NationalVet/

of adults through the accreditation of institutions conducting CVT in the out-of-school system and the development of distance learning;⁹

- The *National Employment Action Plan* for 2002 included actions taken to implement the unified qualification validation system for both the formal (school) and non-formal (out-of school) systems;
- [Poland 2030 Report](#) (prepared by the Prime Minister's Strategic Advisory Panel) outlines the vision of possible development paths and reforms in Poland in the next 20 years, such as the 'change of dominant formula in adult education from school-based methods of formal education into an increasing access to various forms of non-formal and informal learning'.

In general, most developments taken and introduced at the European level have been included in Polish education and training policy and in the draft of the above-mentioned lifelong learning perspective. This is reflected in the focus that was placed on issues such as: key competences (in line with the appropriate Recommendation of the Parliament and the Council), enhancing the transparency of skills and competences acquired both at higher education level (through the use of European Credit Transfer System in Higher Education) and in vocational education and training (however, ECVET is not functioning for vocational education), implementation of the Europass, development of a lifelong guidance system, and, finally, establishing the National Qualifications System and National Qualifications Framework (NQF)¹⁰.

The NQF-related activity in Poland should be particularly emphasised in relation to the validation of non-formal and informal learning. The establishment and implementation of rules and procedures for validation and recognition of qualifications acquired in a non-formal and informal learning context has been envisaged as one of the key elements of the prospective comprehensive National Qualifications System.¹¹ Although the National Qualifications Framework has not yet been introduced in Poland, the work on its design is being carried out under the project, 'Stocktaking of competences and qualifications for the Polish labour market and the development of the National Qualifications Framework model'. Carried out by the Ministry of National Education within the framework of Human Capital Operational Programme, this initiative is led by a team of experts who represent general, vocational and tertiary education, as well as employers and other institutions involved in the development and implementation of the qualifications framework. They decided to pursue a comprehensive framework when approaching the NQF, which is based on the integration of various QFs into one National Qualification Framework covering all levels and forms of education and learning. The new Polish Qualifications Framework model has been drafted in January 2010 and work on it will continue until 2012. Parallel to that, a system for validation of learning outcomes acquired outside the formal system will be developed.¹²

Finally, worth mentioning is also the discussion that centred on definitions applied by the NQF project, notably the meaning of 'qualifications'. In the context of education and careers, the word 'qualifications' in the Polish language stands for the knowledge and skills that are necessary to practice a particular profession. Sometimes 'qualification' is used interchangeably with the word 'competences' and in certain situations can be understood as 'skills' or 'licence' (*uprawnienia*). In EU documents, on the other hand, 'qualifications' are a

⁹ Drozd, A. (2007) A European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning: Poland, ECOTEC Research & Consulting Ltd.

¹⁰ Poland 2030 Report, <http://www.polska2030.pl/>

¹¹ Cedefop (2008) Poland: Overview of the Vocational Education and Training System.

¹² ReferNet Poland (2009) Poland. VET in Europe – Country Report 2009, p.25, 94. http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/eu/pub/cedefop/vetreport/2009_CR_PL.pdf

formal confirmation that a person has achieved learning outcomes according to specific standard. They can therefore be obtained in a process of general and higher education and training. This discrepancy creates difficulties in understanding the idea of a European Qualifications Framework (EQF) in Poland, which is to be eliminated by the development and consistent use of uniform terminology in all documents and materials related to the Qualifications Framework.¹³

2.2 Relationship with the existing/ developing qualifications framework and information on standards used for validation

The current qualifications system in Poland is based mainly on standards and criteria addressing the formal education process, which are defined by the content of education as well as the years of formal learning. This means that qualifications are granted primarily on the basis of the curriculum in a given cycle of education and the duration of training (the number of hours, semesters, and years of education). Therefore, the change in the Polish system of qualifications that is linked to the implementation of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) should result in a transformation of existing structures into the learning outcomes-based process, and corresponding reorientation of the whole system of national education. The first steps towards such developments have already taken place in post-compulsory education and training.¹⁴

While Poland has already developed a set of standards and qualifications, they have not yet been linked to the NQF. The existing classification of qualifications (for 1700 occupations) in the Polish labour market is based on the level of education and the appliance of vocational classifications implemented by the Minister of Economy, Labour and Social Affairs in 2007. Although such a system has certain benefits (e.g. levelling the qualification requirements according to a hierarchical structure) it also has visible gaps, particularly in relation to the area of non-formal and non-job related learning. That is, the current description of vocational qualification requirements does not take into account the ways of acquiring qualifications, other than through formal education and vocational practice.¹⁵

The Polish model of standards for vocational qualifications - inspired by the British qualifications system - is based on the concept of five levels of vocational qualifications. The initiatives in the field have been carried out under the PHARE and ESF projects between 1998 and 2008 and can be perceived as both a supplement and an alternative to the existing classification. These include:

- a) PHARE 98 'Training needs analysis - the creation of vocational qualification standards in Poland' in 1998-2000;
- b) PHARE 2000 'National Vocational Training System' in 2002-2004;
- c) PHARE 2002 'Improving the Public Employment Service in implementing the European Employment Strategy and participation in the EURES system' in 2004-2005;

¹³ Ministry of National Education, European and National Qualifications Frameworks: gain easier, recruit more efficiently, understand better, integrate more, Leaflet on European and National Qualifications Frameworks, <http://www.krk.org.pl/pl/publikacje2>

¹⁴ Since the introduction of external school-leaving tests at secondary level (matura exam and *examination* confirming *vocational qualifications*), the examination boards (central and district) are using nationwide standards for examination requirements, which indicate the expected learning outcomes (Sławiński 2009).

¹⁵ Sztandar-Sztanderska, U. (2009) Polish Qualifications Framework and the labor market. In 'From the European to the National Qualifications Framework', publication prepared under the project of the Ministry of National Education, 'Stocktaking of competences and qualifications for the Polish labour market and the development of a national qualifications framework', <http://www.krk.org.pl/pl/publikacje2>

d) Sectoral Operational Programme - Development of *Human Resources* 'Development and dissemination of national vocational qualifications standards' in 2004-2008.

As a result, standards for [253 occupations](#) were developed (out of which 200 were within the last project) and promoted among employers within these initiatives (initiated and coordinated by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy). While they cover the professions listed in the above-mentioned job classification, they provide more detailed and methodologically unified characteristics of occupational qualifications. They also describe both the activities related to performing a particular profession as well as required or necessary qualifications. Their application appears to be limited, however, mainly to the institutions of vocational education, as reported in the study on the use of national standards for vocational qualifications. Lack of adequate legal provisions regulating the implementation of standards, problems with accessing the information about standards and with their interpretation, their complex structure, lack of financial resources to apply them and inconsistency of standards in the labour market and education system institutions, were listed as the key obstacles to making the most of them.¹⁶

These experiences, together with the introduction of learning outcomes-based core curricula for general education (Regulation of the Ministry of National Education of 23 December 2008 on the core curriculum in pre-school and general education in particular types of schools, OJ 2009 r. No 4 pos. 17) and the (ongoing) development of learning outcomes-based curricula for VET, can be seen as building blocks for the Polish NQF. In addition, the guidelines for the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (2006-2008) were used to create a draft model for the NQF. The work on its design started from the above-mentioned 'stocktaking of qualifications and competences' in the existing Polish education and training system (2008-2010) undertaken by the Ministry of Education in cooperation with the Institute for Educational Research and the 'Cooperation Fund' Foundation. The main result of this project was a report on the draft NQF, which included results of analyses and conceptual works, such as the plan for empirical studies on the recognition of competences and qualifications, and in-depth empirical case studies of various labour market segments and validation procedures in selected sectors of the economy. Thanks to such work, it was possible to identify examples of various forms of validation practices that are spread out across the country (see Section 2.5). These include validation of informal and non-formal learning through various projects (e.g. 'Let's build together' project from Olsztyn) and sectoral or corporate practices (e.g. certificates issued by the Association of Polish Electrical Engineers, the Welding Institute in Gliwice, food industry or major players on the IT market).

As part of the stocktaking project, a set of recommendations that are prerequisites for improving and implementing the [NQF model](#) was also formulated. Among others, they call for the development of a comprehensive inventory and register of qualifications together with the target validation model (procedures, institutions, mechanisms for quality assurance, legal terms), including the validation of learning outcomes achieved outside the formal education system. Correspondingly, according to the NQF expert team, a broad examination of qualifications and competences currently in use in Poland, as well as the methods used for their confirmation or validation should be carried out. While it is widely acknowledged that a number of initiatives and some long-established practices of validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning have been already functioning for some time now, there are no data on how many certificates are being used in the field of formal, non-formal, and informal learning in Poland.

¹⁶ Raport z II badania wykorzystania krajowych standardów kwalifikacji zawodowych, <http://www.mpips.gov.pl/index.php?gid=502&>

2.3 National institutional framework¹⁷

The establishment and implementation of rules, procedures, and an institutional setting for validation and recognition of qualifications acquired in the non-formal and informal learning context has been envisaged as one of the key elements of the prospective comprehensive National Qualifications System.¹⁸ When outlining the Polish NQF model, two types of validation framework were proposed for further consideration:

- **Model 1**, suggesting an extension of powers and responsibilities of the existing system of validation of qualifications acquired in formal education (i.e. District Examination Commissions) through:
 - enabling validation of competences acquired outside the formal education system,
 - giving universities the right to confirm the competences acquired in an informal or non-formal setting (if learning outcomes for the study program include such competences).
- **Model 2** recommending the creation of a new structure for the validation system (including both already functioning and still emerging solutions) through:
 - establishing a new central organisation for validation,
 - the use of accreditation and licensing procedures for existing processes,
 - the development of common quality procedures.

Finally, the formation of a central, supra-departmental body coordinating the processes of examination and validation was listed by the team of experts as one of the key conditions for a proper implementation of the NQF and comparability of qualifications. The main tasks and responsibilities of such an institution would include:

- maintaining and updating the register of certificates/diplomas functioning on the market,
- determining the principles of introducing/removing certificates to/from the registry,
- maintaining and updating the register of institutions that carry out examinations confirming the qualifications and/or validate the competences;
- monitoring these institutions, and
- granting license/accreditation to conduct examinations that confirm qualifications and/or to validate competences.

Moreover, the area of activity of the central coordination institution would involve also direct, NQF and EQF-related tasks (e.g. referencing qualification levels of the national system to the EQF levels, quality assurance in relation to the NQF and EQF, guaranteeing the transparency of the methodology used to refer national qualifications levels to the EQF, ensuring the participation of all relevant national stakeholders).¹⁹ However, the creation of

¹⁷ Most of the information in this section was taken from Woźniak, W., Frankowicz, M. and Żuber-Zielicz, M. (2009) Validation of learning outcomes - outline of the problem. In 'From the European to the National Qualifications Framework', publication prepared under the project of the Ministry of National Education, 'Stocktaking of competences and qualifications for the Polish labour market and the development of a national qualifications framework', <http://www.krk.org.pl/pl/publikacje2>

¹⁸ Cedefop (2008) Poland: Overview of the Vocational Education and Training System.

¹⁹ Woźniak, W. (2009) Validation of learning outcomes acquired outside the formal system, presentation at the conference on the 'Polish NQF in the context of vocational education and training' in Łódź, 14 December, http://vhost-116.popsystem.eu/pliki/dokumenty/558_walidacja_efektow_pozzaform_141209.ppt

such specialised testing facilities, equipped with appropriate tools and materials, training of examiners, development of procedures, and verification and monitoring system, appears to be a task that is both organisationally challenging and requiring considerable funding.

2.4 Division of responsibilities (national, regional, local, provider level) according to the different aspects of validation

Characteristic for the Polish vocational education system is the division of responsibilities between various ministries. The Ministry for National Education and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy are responsible for the definition and renewal of qualification standards in vocational education and training. The Ministry of Education is also in charge of the quality and organisation of vocational education in general but the core curricula (*podstawy programowe kształcenia w zawodzie*) are prepared in consultation with the respective Ministries for the particular vocational field (e.g. the Ministry of Health is responsible for standards in medical professions).

In the vocational education and training sector, four areas of validation were distinguished within the 'Stocktaking of competences and qualifications for the Polish labour market and the development of a national qualifications framework' project, together with various bodies that are responsible for them:

- Central Examination Commission (*Centralna Komisja Egzaminacyjna, CKE*) and eight District Examination Commissions (*Okręgowa Komisja Egzaminacyjna, OKE*) in charge of examinations confirming vocational qualifications in the formal education system;
- Chambers of crafts supervised by the Polish Craft Association that carry out master and journeyman exams, which are treated as a part of formal system of vocational education;
- Sectoral organisations/branch associations (e.g. Accountants Association, Polish Federation of Engineering Associations, the Association of Polish Electricians) which organise training, exams and certification;
- Institutions/organisations that carry out validation of informal and non-formal learning through various, often ESF-funded, projects.

In addition, a growing number of corporate practices involving validation emerge, usually in the most innovative sectors of the economy. Certificates confirming qualifications to operate the products of specific companies, often multinational corporations operating in the IT market like IBM, Microsoft and Cisco, have become widely recognised and respected by employers.

As for adult continuing education, several levels of state administration are in charge, with the key responsible bodies at the central level including:

- The Minister for National Education, whose competences include formulation of overall policies concerning education;
- The Minister for Labour and Social Policy, who lays down conditions and procedures for attending training and other forms of vocational activation by the unemployed and job seekers;
- The Minister for Finance, who proposes the budget assumptions for a given budget year and tax allowances; and

- The Minister for Science and Higher Education, who is responsible for administration, preparation and implementation of the strategy and policies for the development of higher education.²⁰

2.5 Examples of regional, local or EU funded initiatives

Whereas work on the validation and recognition of informal and non-formal learning is being developed on a gradual basis, certain validation practices already exist in various forms and sectors. Such initiatives are often triggered by a group of actors who collectively establish their own validation procedures and begin to carry out a validation process according to these rules. They emerge as a bottom-up response to regional or national labour market needs and are often supported by European funds. Therefore, it could be said that at the moment the area of non-formal learning tends to respond to current trends, general continuing vocational training policy and labour market needs.²¹

One of the most recent examples is the 'Pilot project on confirming professional qualifications in Warsaw', financed from the ESF (project budget: 1 666 802 PLN).²² From September 2009 to August 2011, this Town Hall initiative introduced by the Warsaw Education Bureau targets tinsmiths, car sprayers and car mechanics, confectioners and bakers, who volunteer to undertake an examination to confirm their competences. Altogether, 200 participants from the capital city and its neighbouring districts are invited to participate in the project. The main objective is to help them to confirm their qualifications obtained in a non-formal and informal way by an external examination. Accordingly, the specific objectives of the project are as follows:

- development of two validation programmes for vocational qualifications: 1) in the whole profession (completed with a journeyman/master exam); 2) for particular vocational tasks (completed with a the examination of three vocational tasks);
- increasing opportunities for employment or maintaining employment for persons without professional qualifications.

Before the training started, tests were carried out to recognise the training needs of selected participants. Based on their results, the training programmes were developed (competency gap test) and the participants divided into several groups depending on their skills and experience. The training programme was developed separately for each group attending the courses (in a form of weekly meetings). It is expected that 80% of participants will confirm their competences and those who, prior to participation, did not have certified qualifications will increase their employment opportunities and/or maintain their employment. The project also aims to prepare the members of the examination commissions for a new approach to vocational examination.²³

A similar initiative for food equipment and machinery operators is being implemented from March 2009 to March 2011 by the District Vocational Education Centre in Września and the Wrzesiński District, financed from the ESF and the state budget.²⁴

²⁰ Cedefop (2008) Poland: Overview of the Vocational Education and Training System.

²¹ ReferNet Poland (2009) Poland. VET in Europe – Country Report, p.54.

²² Priority: IX. Development of skills and competences in the regions. Action 9.3. Dissemination of formal continuous learning.

²³ Invest in human resources, http://www.inwestycjawkadry.info.pl/szkolenie-pilotazowy_projekt_potwierdzania_kwalifikacji_zawodowych_w_warszawie,sz,67077.html

²⁴ More about the project can be found at: <http://www.pcez.wrzesnia.powiat.pl/szkolenia-efs-93/14-dziaani-93/35-dzialanie-9-3program-formalnego-potwierdzenia-kwalifikacji-zawodowych-w-zawodzie-operator-maszyn-i-urzadzen-przemyslu-spozywczegoq.html>

The growing demand for validation of competences acquired outside the formal education system is also expressed by the 'Let's Build it Together' project, funded by the EQUAL programme in 2008, which merits a further detailed examination. Alongside the above-mentioned examples, the experience gained during this project will be used in the implementation of the European and National Qualifications Framework.

"Let's Build it Together" Project (2006-2008)²⁵

"Let's Build it Together" was established within the framework of the EQUAL Community Initiative in order to find new ways of solving problems related to insufficient use of new technologies in enterprises and inequality in the labour market, including difficulties stemming from the lack of possibilities to recognise and certify competences of workers in the construction and sanitary industries. The target group of the project were mainly people engaged in the building sector, often from rural areas. There were no restrictions in terms of age, gender or education, or current employment status (employed or unemployed).

The general aim of the partnership was to increase the competition level of building sector companies in the Warmia and Mazury region by implementing innovations. Accordingly, one of the sub-objectives of the project was to: 1) design a methodology; 2) test professional qualifications validation model (based on a French example); and 3) adapt and implement new ways of vocational training for workers in construction sector. The validation of informal competences had a regional character and its purpose was: to improve the skills of construction personnel, to increase the role of economic self-government, to facilitate access to the labour market, the dissemination of new technologies, and to increase the quality of service of construction personnel.

The high quality of the validation process is subject to compliance with the following requirements:

- an efficient management structure,
- professional techno-didactic base,
- documentation of the process,
- pedagogical supervision,
- continuous monitoring and evaluation.

The quality requirements for the process of validating informal competences resulted from the compliance to the quality policy applied by the [Warmia and Mazury Vocational Training Centre](#) in Olsztyn (an autonomous non-governmental organisation with non-profit status). All stages of training (which also included validation of competences) were defined in the "Quality Manual" in the form of procedures and their associated detailed instructions.

The project was implemented as a partnership formed by the leading partner, Warmia and Mazury Vocational Training Centre in Olsztyn, the Olsztyn Chamber of Construction (a trade association of construction companies), and the State Property Agency (a local branch in Olsztyn) The Polish Corporation (Association) of Sanitary, Heating and Gas Installation Companies. It also envisaged cooperation with French partners, which enabled the national development partnership to recognise and adapt new ways of strengthening branch associations and innovative pedagogical approaches for the construction sector workers, and introducing professional competence validation system. Cooperation which the Spanish partnership was related mainly to the development of new ways of conciliation of family life with work.

The main result of the project was a set of tools for assessing unemployed people's and workers' competences (gained also through informal learning process) within a single construction specialisation and then testing this approach in practice. The validation system allowed the unemployed people and workers to obtain a certificate confirming their skills, without a need to participate in a full training cycle, which in turn increased their chances for keeping, changing or obtaining employment. There were 283 candidates of different ages and with differing education who expressed their will to take part in the project, which exceeded the organisers' expectations. Ultimately, 186 people received a formal confirmation of their qualifications as installation and sanitation fitters and 87 people as gas installation fitters.

The quality management of the validation of informal competences was based on four levels of control and monitoring:

- Level 1 - addresses the validation of participant's competences and the supervision is conducted by the Examination Committee;
- Level 2 - relates to the Examination Committee and the supervision is conducted by the Director of the facility responsible for the implementation of the training process,
- Level 3 - relates to the training facility (the organiser of the validation process) and control is carried out by the Board of the Warmia and Mazury Vocational Training Centre together with authorized representatives of the project administrator,
- Level 4 - applies to the project administrator and supervision is led by the steering group representing the leading project partners in a form of study visits and external audits as well as the inspection of the National Support Structure under EQUAL programme.

Amongst developments taken at the European level, the Europass initiative has been transposed into national legislation, which means that the decision is legally binding and national authorities are obliged to conform to it. Accordingly, starting from 2005, the 'Europass - Supplement to the Diploma' has been used obligatorily by universities in Poland and since 2006 the 'Europass - Certificate Supplement' has been provided by District Examination Commissions to people who hold a diploma confirming vocational qualifications.²⁶

2.6 Link between validation and the existing/developing credit system, unit-based or modularised structure of qualifications

The implementation of modular training in out-of-school education has been ongoing in Poland since 1995 and is constantly evolving. In recent years especially, modular programmes for vocational education and training have become more popular. For instance, the model adopted by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy when building the vocational qualification standards refers to the individual, professional tasks, the pursuit of which is conditioned by vocational skills clusters, knowledge, and psychophysical characteristics. Accordingly, four groups of vocational qualifications were identified for vocational qualification standards developed in the Ministry's project: extra-professional, general, basic and specialised qualifications, which in a way correspond to categories of human capital. Thanks to such an approach, a standard is based on a modular approach, which is useful for the development of modular programmes for vocational training, and crucial for building the National and European Qualifications Frameworks.²⁷ It also provides a convenient way of 'translating' the qualification requirements from the labour market into ways of obtaining the appropriate qualifications, especially in modular, non-formal and formal learning.²⁸

In the future, the implementation of the National Vocational Qualification Standards, training modules and validation of competences in Poland should form an integral structure adding transparency to the NQF. Accordingly, the validation system will be supported by the adaptation of the European Credit Transfer System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) until 2011 and its subsequent implementation by linking it with the National Qualifications Framework. The development of a new institutional and legal framework for

the coordination of recognition and certification of vocational qualifications is considered as a necessary step in this area.²⁹

The fundamental components of planned changes in upcoming years are activities related to the implementation of the Ministry of Education's systemic projects planned within the Human Capital Operational Programme for the 2007-2013 - Priority III ('High quality of education system'). Hence, alongside the development of the NQF and the National Qualifications System, the implementation of broad partnership projects envisages also:

- the modernisation of the core curricula for vocational education in terms of labour market requirements and the knowledge economy, and
- the provision of a support system for schools and educational institutions implementing modular vocational training programmes.

It is expected that the main effect of 'modular learning' will be an increased flexibility of both school and out-of-school vocational education, because the modules can be implemented in formal as well as in the non-formal system.

Finally, the main idea in the proposed model of the Polish Qualifications Framework is that the Polish system of qualifications will develop towards two kinds of qualifications being distinguished: 'full' and 'partial'. While the former will always be assigned to a certain level, the latter will be narrower in scope, standing for partial fulfilment of the requirements specified for a full qualification. In addition, each full qualification will have a specified minimum 'volume' or 'capacity' (a size, quantity, and a scope of learning outcomes that are characteristic for it), including the minimum 'volume' of learning outcomes. This volume of qualifications will be determined by ECTS, ECVET and SATO credit points.³⁰ Whereas the ECTS and ECVET systems are already known in Poland, the System of Accumulation and Transfer of Achievements (SATO) is a new idea at the very initial stage of development. If implemented, the measure of 'volume' of learning outcomes in line with SATO points would be an average workload of a learner (on levels 1-4 in general education) required to achieve certain effects, if learning takes place in the formal education system.³¹

2.7 Funding framework

Resources for the validation of non-formal learning may come from:

- state and local government budgets,
- special-purpose funds: e.g. the Labour Fund, State Fund for Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons,
- programmes supporting vocational activity of people with disabilities,
- foreign assistance funds – i.e. World Bank loans,
- European structural funds,
- enterprises,
- individual's own funds. ??

Particularly worth highlighting are operational programmes (OPs) financed from ESF such as the Human Resources Development OP (2004-2006), Human Capital OP (2007-2013) and the Common Initiative EQUAL (2004-2008). They contributed to boosting different forms of non-formal and informal learning as well as continuing education for various groups of participants that developed as part of projects carried out under those programmes. These initiatives are generally free of charge for their participants. The human and technical resources required for their implementation are usually financed both by EU funds and by the project partners who provide their contribution in a form of non-cash

assets and resources (as, for example, in the "Let's Build it Together" project)³² As for the sectoral exams, they are usually financed by the applicants (who can apply for the reimbursement of the examination fee at the labour offices).

2.8 Data on flows of beneficiaries

There is no systematic and comprehensive statistical data available regarding the situation (including that of beneficiaries) of non-formal and informal learning in Poland. However, based on the information available from the aforementioned examples of validation projects, it appears that there is a high demand for validation of non-formal and informal learning within professions targeted by these projects. To give some examples:

- 283 candidates signed up for the 'Let's Build it Together' project and received a formal confirmation of their competences; a number of people still continue to express their interest in validation within this project;
- 127 people signed up for the Warsaw Town Hall pilot project (see Section 2.5.) within the first part of the programme (the required number was 100) and 110 people took part in this initiative (the recruitment for the second programme is in process);
- 140 applications were received for the project designed for food machinery and equipment operators in Września out of which 88 people were selected to confirm their competences.

Some trends in non-formal and informal education in terms of learner's profile were explored by the Central Statistical Office (GUS).³³ According to the research results in the area of non-formal education:

- the majority of participants come from urban areas (approximately 78%),
- most of them are relatively young (25-34 years),
- non-formal education is undertaken mainly by employed (91.9%) and highly qualified people,
- slightly more women (51.7%) than men participate in this form of activity.

Similar features can be attributed to people participating in informal education. Here, as well the largest share falls into the youngest age category (25-29: 18.9% and 30-34: 16.1%). The most numerous group consists of employed people (about 79%) with higher education (42.3%). Also, there is almost no gender-based difference amongst learners from both rural and urban areas.³⁴

Comparable trends were reported by Eurostat. Therefore, it seems that well educated people are more aware of the need to upgrade and develop their skills and knowledge throughout their lives. Such a tendency can be explained to some extent by opportunities for improving education offered by enterprises. In addition, to remain competitive, employees have to continuously improve their knowledge and adapt to the needs of their employer on a regular basis.³⁵

3 ORGANISATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON VALIDATION

3.1 Role of the formal education and training sector, including providers

In Poland, the general principle is that the institutions responsible for formal education (schools, universities) also have the power to issue appropriate types of certificate and diplomas. As a result, the formal documents confirming qualifications most often can be obtained by persons who participated in training organised by such institutions. A separation of educational activities from those related to organising the validation process was recommended by the NQF expert team as a necessary step in the implementation of a lifelong learning policy.³⁶

Since the reform of the education system launched in 1999, the new evaluation system covers internal and external types of evaluation. While internal evaluation is carried out by teachers based on the requirements resulting from the school curriculum, external evaluations are organised by the Central Examination Commission (*Centralna Komisja Egzaminacyjna*, CKE) and eight District Examination Commissions (*Okręgowa Komisja Egzaminacyjna*, OKE). On a non-obligatory formal education level, both CKE and OKE are responsible for the following types of examinations:

- matriculation exam (*matura*) when completing the high school level (lyceum and technical school),
- examinations confirming vocational qualifications conducted in occupations that are included in the school classification of occupations (these exams have both theoretical and practical part),
- extramural exams for adults who may obtain graduation certificates from schools (on ISCED 1-3).

According to the Polish Ministry of National Education, the latter type of examination can be considered as one of the elements of the developing system of validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, as there is no necessity to attend school in order to attain the certificate.³⁷ Among other steps towards the validation system, the following examples were also listed in the Ministry's report on the implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Programme Work Programme:

- exemption from external national exams on the basis of achievements in national and international students' Olympiads and school subject contents,
- the system of exams for apprentices and masters organised by vocational associations,
- preparation to launch the external exams acknowledging vocational qualifications of individuals who are not graduates of vocational schools, and
- improving the external exams system with the aim of using them in the validation process.³⁸

With regards to continuing vocational training (CVT), particularly worth highlighting are the Continuing Education Centres (*Centra Kształcenia Ustawicznego*, CKUs), which provide key educational, examination and commercial services within the system. As multifunctional public education facilities, they offer education, further education and training to adults, in both in-school and out-of school forms (including awarding qualification titles and the organisation of extramural examinations). The CKUs also play an important role in terms of providing training courses, commissioned by labour offices, and advisory services for

teachers and trainers involved in adult education, as well as in preparing and implementing modern curricula and methods in adult education.³⁹ Alongside CKUs, Vocational Training Centres (*Zakłady Doskonalenia Zawodowego*, ZDZs) and Practical Training Centres (*Centra Kształcenia Zawodowego*, CKPs) can organise and provide continuing education on a regular daily basis, in the extramural form and as distance learning. In 2008, there were 136 Continuing Education Centres, 137 Practical Training Centres and 24 Vocational Training Centres operating all over the country, all of which could apply for accreditation from relevant school inspectorate having fulfilled requirements specified in the Education System Act (Art.68b).⁴⁰

3.2 Role of existing information, advice and guidance networks / institutions

Information about the process of validation of non-formal and informal learning at the current stage is scarce and the discussion on the issue remains limited to a narrow group of specialists and educators. It is still a new element in the Polish educational reality that will require wide dissemination. The validation system should be interrelated with the vocational guidance and information structures, which might become a challenge for vocational advisers in the future.

3.3 Validation in the private sector and the role of private sector actors

One of the long-established practices of validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning in private sectors in Poland is the training and examination for craftsmen and candidates for particular certificates in craftsmanship. The 1989 Crafts Act (OJ 1989, No. 17, item 92 with subsequent amendments) stipulates the conditions for carrying out examinations for craftsmen for the certificate of apprentice and foreman in crafts, which is recognised by employers and State administration at a national level. These examinations can be taken by both young people who have completed vocational education and training in crafts, and adults wishing to validate their knowledge and skills acquired through work and theoretical training (the latter must have as a minimum a general education certificate at ISCED level 1).⁴¹ The openness and accessibility of this track of examination for these two groups make it different from exams carried out by OKE and correspond in a way to validation of informal and non-formal learning.

Also, in the case of certain occupations (e.g. security worker, engineers and technical staff in the electrical power sector, work safety and hygiene technicians and officers), responsibility for validation is delegated to the relevant sectoral bodies and professional associations. They issue and deliver state-recognised certificates following training and examinations organised within the respective occupation or craft.⁴² Furthermore, in some industries, special standards are set and work-based learning courses are easily recognised by other enterprises across the sector (e.g. in banking or construction sector).

The certification system of the Polish Welding Institute of Excellence can be used as an example of a non-formal certificate issued within the private sector. It is described in the box below.

The certification system of the Polish Welding Institute of Excellence (INSPAW) in Gliwice⁴³

Established in 1945, the Polish Welding Institute (*Instytut Spawalnictwa*) is a leading and key welding research and development centre in Poland. It has a long-standing activity, specialising in welding technology and coordinated numerous R&D projects.

The Certification Centre, separated from the Institute's structure, is a body dealing with the certification/qualification of welding personnel. The Institute issues diplomas, which cover the following categories:

The certification system of the Polish Welding Institute of Excellence (INSPAW) in Gliwice⁴³

- International/European Welding Engineer,
- International/European Welding Technologist,
- International Welding Inspector,
- International/European Welding Specialist,
- International/European Welding Practitioner
- European Welder.

Also, certificates of competence with specified expiry dates have been introduced. "Certificate of Welder" is a certificate of competence for welders. The Centre is also accredited by the PCA for issuing certificates of competence in methods of testing, such as visual inspection, penetrant inspection, magnetic particle inspection, radiographic examination, and ultrasonic testing.

The Institute issues diplomas and certificates (outside the formal education system) listed above. Persons who have received the certificates have a license to practice in Poland and abroad. In 2009, approximately 300 diplomas were issued together with 100 new certificates for welding personnel and 910 certifications for NDT personnel.

The Certification Centre is accredited by:

- the Polish Centre for Accreditation (PCA),
- the European Welding Federation (EWF), which offers international training and qualifications in welding, and
- the International Institute of Welding (IIW).

The list of certificates obtained by the Certification Centre is available at: http://www.is.gliwice.pl/oferta_cert_certyfikaty.php

The Certification Centre has quality systems implemented according to the following norms: PN-EN 45011:2000, BS EN 45012:2000, ISO / IEC 17024:2004. Validation is systematically carried out by units of the PCA, EWF, IIW. The certification activity of the Centre is overseen by the Managing Board. It is comprised of the representatives of the industry, universities, trade associations, technical organizations and the International Authorization Council (15 people).

In general, the private sector shows a high level of interest in the implementation of the validation system. It is perceived by entrepreneurs as the opportunity to enhance the occupational mobility of workers and to reduce costs associated with attracting qualified personnel. Entities associating employers from various sectors have declared their readiness to engage in systemic validation projects funded from external sources. It is expected that over time strong Chambers of Commerce will make attempts to implement validation so as to verify both the specialist (unique) as well as most common or expected skills. Also, business entities functioning within national corporations, holdings, and institutions operating on international markets will adapt different solutions applied abroad to their own needs. At present, it is mainly training institutions which act as initiators of validation testing.

3.4 Validation in the third sector and the role of third sector actors

The third sector in Poland is rather active in taking the initiative towards the validation of informal and non-formal learning. One of the reasons for this is that many non-governmental organisations, associations and societies (e.g. Polish Red Cross, Union of Polish Scouts, Caritas, voluntary workers organisations, houses of culture, associations 'Open doors', 'Semper Avanti', 'Tratwa') offer their membership and beneficiaries the possibility of learning by doing and other forms of informal and non-formal learning. In particular, activities in the framework of charity, voluntary work and in other forms of practical experience grant possibilities to attain a set of entirely new competences and knowledge, and the workers are particularly interested in their validation.⁴⁴

There are various certificates offered by third sector organisations (e.g. in voluntary work), however, they are not official and thus not recognised by the state. Voluntary experience has only recently started to become recognised and promoted in schools and universities on an individual basis. Among the main bodies that specialise in providing training for volunteers are the [Volunteer Centres](#) in Poland. All Regional Volunteer Centres apply the same standards of work and are linked by mutual commitments, as expressed in the Volunteer's Card (*Karta wolontariusza*). The centres organise sessions for both volunteers and coordinators of volunteering, during which volunteers are familiarised with the concept of volunteering as well as the functioning of Regional Volunteer Centres. Individuals who complete the training for coordinators receive a certificate and are awarded the status of 'Coordinator of volunteers' work'.

There are also other initiatives that include, for instance, the cooperation of representatives from the non-governmental and business sector. The subsequent description of training for unemployed people from Southern Poland organised through the collaboration of a foundation and a development agency offers a good example of such an activity.

" Paramedic occupation - new opportunity for you" Project (2009-2010)⁴⁵

"Paramedic occupation - new opportunity for you" is a project targeting persons aged 50+ from Podkarpackie region who are long-term unemployed (over 12 months) and receiving social benefits. Its main aim is the socio-vocational reintegration of 60 people from this group who will have a chance to determine their own career path through individual consultations with a professional vocational advisor.

Apart from 3-day-long integration workshops, the project envisages 132 hours of theoretical training and 176 hours of practical training that should provide project participants with the knowledge and skills necessary to provide paramedic services for the elderly. The training will end with an examination and a certificate. After the completion of training and obtaining the certification, the participants will carry out semi-professional practice in hospitals, nursing homes, and social help centres, where designated persons will supervise the new trainees. These activities are intended to assist them in returning to the labour market and acquiring more self-confidence.

The comprehensive support offered to the project participants gives them also opportunity for free participation in training and paid semi-professional practice. All participants are provided with protective clothing, footwear, medical examination, insurance, and reimbursement for travel expenses. Also, for vocational practice they will receive a salary (1000 PLN per month) and a bonus for travelling.

The " Paramedic occupation - new opportunity for you" project is being implemented from October 2009 to December 2010 by the [Regional Development Agency](#) in Rzeszów in cooperation with the [Civic Academy Foundation](#) and it is co-funded by the European Union's European Social Fund.

3.5 Costs to organisations

There are no studies regarding the costs to organisations in Poland. In general, education at schools where public administration (at any level) is the leading authority is financed from state budgets. Also the external examination is free of charge, although travel costs and accommodation of those undertaking the exam are not subsidised. In the case of private schools, the learners are obliged to pay for the tuition.

As for the training organised by the public employment services (mainly the district labour offices), the beneficiaries of such education are not charged. Likewise, an employer whose staff training is supported by labour offices, does not have to pay the tuition fees, although not all labour offices offer this type of training.

4 INDIVIDUAL PERSPECTIVE

4.1 Awareness-raising and recruitment

At a project level (e.g. 'Let's build together' from Olsztyn – see above) the validation process usually addresses a specific group of people with experience in certain areas (e.g. in baking, in gas installation, etc.) and the recruitment process is supported by promotion in the press, radio and television. Yet, direct contacts with potential 'possessors' of specific skills identified by the training institutions operating in the regions are considered as the most important means of raising awareness and recruitment. Hence, long-term functioning of a training company in a local or regional labour market is the most effective form of recruitment or promotion of validation.

4.2 Provision of guidance and support

Within the school system, each student has the possibility of obtaining additional support from a teacher, a methodical adviser, a psychologist and a professional counsellor. Outside the school system, the only support available is aimed at unemployed people registered at employment offices. In other situations, individuals have to organise guidance and support on their own and with their own funds.

In validation related projects the validation process is preceded by instructions on the procedure, the conditions of recruitment, location and time of a course, and the principles of successful completion. The organiser of the validation process provides also relevant information and instructions related to the exam.

4.3 Costs to individuals

Outside the school system, education is financed either from funds generated by the project, by the employer or from students' own financial resources (see section 1.2.5).

4.4 Initiatives focused on specific target groups

The project 'Valid-Info' is an example of an initiative which aims at promoting and validating non-formal and informal learning in the field of integration through work for disadvantaged people. Its key objectives include:

- the recognition of non-formal and informal education in the programmes for continuing training of adults with a particular focus on certain professions;
- the adaptation and transfer of methodologies that have already been tested, especially the German ProfilPASS system⁴⁶ (a tool that helps to identify and map non-formal and informal competences).

The project is carried out and financially supported within the framework of the Leonardo da Vinci programme - Transfer of Innovation, and it will run for two years (from 2008 to 2010). It is planned that it will bring the following results: 1) creation of a system based on the ProfilPASS for the validation and promotion of non formal and informal learning; 2) specification of standards for the recognition and validation of those competences; and 3) compilation of the final handbook 'Guidelines, advice, instruments and paths for the evaluation and the recognition of competences gained through non-formal training'.

The final 'Valid-Info' users and beneficiaries are mainly intercultural mediators and people working on the professional integration of people with disabilities, who will be able to recognise and validate their competences acquired through non-formal and informal

training. Also regions, universities and training centres can become the intermediate users of the project.⁴⁷

4.5 Evidence of benefits to individuals

Building on the experience of the 'Let's build together' project from Olsztyn, it can be said that a key benefit to individuals from participating in a validation initiative is an opportunity to confirm their skills and obtain a certificate without bearing any costs. At the same time, the employers involved in the project had easy access to people who declared their willingness to be employed having successfully validated their competences.

Moreover, the survey carried out throughout the project has shown that the participants were motivated to formally confirm their skills by a range of factors. Among the most important motivations specified by the respondents were: to increase their employment opportunities (35%) and to obtain a certificate (22%).

The evaluation of this project also revealed that the validation of competences acquired through non-formal learning had a positive impact on the self-esteem of its participants and their desire to improve their competences. Accordingly, almost all respondents who participated in the project felt encouraged to undertake further training (98%). It can therefore be concluded that the validation of competences helped to stimulate the need for further education among the participants.

5 QUALITY ASSURANCE AND EVALUATION

5.1 Quality Assurance Framework

The problem of quality in validation has so far been treated rather marginally in the literature on the subject. Therefore, the NQF expert team pointed to the need for a complex and extensive nationwide study in the field of validation in formal, non-formal and informal contexts. The main results of such research should include a list and characteristics of credentials (diplomas, certificates, licenses, permissions, etc.) awarded in Poland together with a description of procedures applied during a process of granting them (admission, evaluation, validation, quality assurance). The knowledge gathered through such an initiative should inform the creation of a quality assurance system in all learning areas, which should be a key element of qualification system and a necessary condition for proper and effective implementation of the NQF.

As further noted in a publication illustrating the results achieved in the first, preliminary phase of the project, 'Stocktaking of competences and qualifications for the Polish labour market...' (October 2008 - October 2009), ensuring the quality of the learning outcomes (competences) is also equally crucial from the stakeholders' viewpoint. Here, the three most important measures to ensure quality relate to:

- the credibility of the validation or confirmation of the qualification,
- accreditation and/or other control of education and training institutions, and
- ensuring the quality of the education process and of assessment leading to the recognition of qualifications.

Whilst a culture of quality should be created around these processes, the institutions offering education should also be encouraged to take responsibility for the quality of their collaboration with stakeholders, such as validating, examining and certifying bodies, as well as agencies ensuring the quality of education.⁴⁸

5.2 Quality assurance systems / procedures

As a result of various validation projects, including those described elsewhere in this report, a methodology for the validation process has already been developed for certain professions, together with corresponding quality requirements to ensure the credibility of the issued certificates. These measures can also be applied to other vocational areas after specifying thematic fields and merits relevant for particular professions. The quality requirements for the process of validating informal competences may result from the compliance with the quality policy applied by a certain institution carrying out the validation process.

For instance, the control over the validation of non-formal competences, and the quality of the validation process in the 'Let's build together' project, was subject to compliance with a set of requirements and levels (see Section 2.5). In addition, throughout the implementation of validation of informal competences, interim analyses of data, collected from various stakeholders (directly and indirectly) involved in shaping the new model, were also carried out (including the views of independent external experts). Ultimately, the quality assessment of the validation service in relation to non-formal competences was aiming to provide comprehensive, accurate and objective information on all indicators that affect the quality of this process and thus serve as a starting point for its permanent improvement in the future.

Clearly, the standards for validation procedures require further development. The description of quality assurance procedures for validation of competences and awarding qualifications were listed by the NQF expert team as one of the key future activities to be carried out. The separation of training and assessing bodies should be the key principle guiding both validation and the examination process as a whole. It can be assured in various ways through the appliance of validation procedures that ensure the objectivity of the process. This in turn can be achieved by inviting external observers to participate in the Examination Committee; in case of training institutions these could be representatives of employers and other stakeholders.

6 ASSESSMENT METHODS

6.1 Methods used

The most common validation method applied in Poland represents a mixed approach. It usually consists of an examination in the form of a test of work activity (*próba pracy*), based on checking the practical skills, accompanied by a theoretical part (written or oral examination). Other methods that can be used to validate competences include:

- presenting a portfolio that confirms achievements and documents competences in the field
- providing letters from former employers confirming that during a certain period the employee was involved in a specific activity (documented experience).

Depending on what type of competences are concerned, validation can also take the form of a probationary period.

6.2 Advantages and disadvantages of methods used

As noted briefly in Section 2.1, it can be difficult for candidates to pass external vocational examinations (*egzamin potwierdzający kwalifikacje zawodowe*) without having attending formal education/training, even for a specialist in a certain profession if he or she did not graduate from vocational school. This is due to the fact that apart from skills and competences related to one's occupation, it is also necessary to have a particular knowledge, e.g. about labour law, to undertake the exam successfully. Hence, a person who is a specialist in a certain profession, but has not finished relevant courses or school, still cannot confirm his or her specific knowledge and skills with an appropriate document.

For comparison, it is worth mentioning also that in validation projects for persons who have acquired skills through work experience, the theoretical test caused more difficulties than the practical examination part. As confirmed by the Olsztyn project participants, the performance of practical tasks for more than half of the examinees (54%) was considered to be easy or very easy. On the other hand, the theory test was evaluated as easy by only 38% of respondents and the majority (55%) perceived it as being difficult.

7 VALIDATION PRACTITIONERS

Outside of general education, particularly in the field of 'regulated occupations', which have their conditions specified in the legal acts, it is necessary to hold a relevant entitlement (specific for various professions) to become a member of an examination committee. For instance, the information about training for people who would like to obtain a driving licence for a tram can be found in the Regulation of the Minister of Infrastructure of 27 October 2005 on the training, examination and certification for vehicle drivers, instructors and examiners.⁴⁹

In the case of projects for validation of non-formal competences, the organisational support for the process can be provided by experienced trainers from organisations where adult and youth education is a statutory activity. The examination committees usually consist of respected experts and professionals from the industry, long-time practitioners, representatives of employers and academia and in the specific field, as well as members of external examination commissions confirming vocational skills through formal education. More specifically, as shown by the 'Let's build together' project, the examination committee members should satisfy the following requirements and possess:

- knowledge of qualification standards in the profession,
- knowledge of health and safety regulations, especially with regards to the specificity of the profession,
- knowledge of responsibilities in the workplace on a given position.

In addition to the above, other desired requirements include:

- practical experience in assessing the knowledge,
- practical experience in the profession,
- experience from other examination commissions,
- representing a well-known sectoral, education or training institution that is respected in the labour market.

As for qualification requirements for validation practitioners in the formal education system – who in the future might be involved in validating competences acquired also outside the formal education system – they are specified in the Act of 7 September 1991 on the education system (OJ 2004, No. 257, item 2572 with subsequent amendments). According to article 9c, paragraph 4, a person who wants to become an examiner who conducts an examination confirming vocational qualifications should:

- be a representative of employers or an employers' organisation or professional association or local government;
- have qualifications required for the apprenticeship instructor and a minimum of three years of experience in the examined profession;
- meet the conditions set out in article 19, paragraph 10. 5, points 2-4 of the Act of 26 January 1982 on the Teacher's Charter (e.g. full legal capacity and public rights, no pending criminal or disciplinary proceedings or incapacitation, not punished for an intentionally committed crime);
- successfully finish a training course for examiners, organised by a District Examination Commission, completed with the knowledge of the principles for conducting and evaluating tests and exams.

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Stakeholder consultations:

National Centre for Supporting Vocational and Continuing Education (*Krajowy Ośrodek Wspierania Edukacji Zawodowej i Ustawicznej*, [KOWEziU](#))

Warmia and Mazury Department for Professional Development in Olsztyn (*Warmińsko-Mazurski Zakład Doskonalenia Zawodowego*, WMZDZ)