



# European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2014

## Country report Poland

by Aleksandra Duda and Maciej Gruza

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# 1 Introduction

Since 2010 new measures have been developed in Poland concerning the validation of learning outcomes acquired through informal learning or non-formal learning. The main change introduced in 2012 is the option of passing an extra-mural vocational exam carried out by the Regional Examination Boards, without the need for prior formal vocational education. This is a fundamental change in the school system, integrating it with informal and non-formal education.

The introduction of validation has been seen as a key element of the development of the Polish Qualifications Framework. So far the existing legal framework does not include the definition of validation and there are no central regulations addressing validation as a systemic solution. It should be noted that the need for such regulations covering all contexts of education at all levels is stated in government policy documents. As a result of the conclusion of the development phase of a new national qualifications system based on the EQF, Poland adopted a uniform definition of validation. This definition should be understood as a multi-step process to verify, regardless of learning context, if the competences required for a qualification have been achieved. Validation leads to certification.

It should be noted that work on a uniform validation system has not yet been completed therefore, the final shape of the system cannot be determined at the moment.

## 2 National perspective on validation

### 2.1 National legal framework, system or policy on validation

In Poland there are two systemic solutions in the field of validation and recognition of learning outcomes acquired through informal learning or non-formal learning processes. These solutions were introduced during the implementation of recent reforms of the education system. The current legal framework in the field of education does not define the term 'validation', but central-level regulations concerning education (including vocational education) address the validation of learning outcomes achieved outside of formal education. Exams and certificates confirm the acquisition of knowledge, skills and social competences 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.<sup>1</sup> As such, this report provides information on the system of validation, the educational infrastructure in place to support it and the provision of non-formal training in Poland.

As explained in the 2010 Update, the Polish learning culture remains dominated by learning in a formal context, where formal qualifications verified on the basis of examinations are still preferred. As a consequence, the underestimated value of practical, especially non-formal and informal learning 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.<sup>2</sup> This is further confirmed by official results in reaching European benchmarks for 2020 that are to guide progress on the Education and Training 2020 Work Programme.<sup>3</sup> Although Poland has

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<sup>1</sup> 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).

<sup>2</sup> Diagnosis of the Poland 2030 Report, [http://www.mlodziej.org.pl/s/p/aktualnosci/45/455/Stanislaw\\_Drzazdzewski\\_3.pdf](http://www.mlodziej.org.pl/s/p/aktualnosci/45/455/Stanislaw_Drzazdzewski_3.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> 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 Europe 2020 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.

relatively easily reached the values established for four (out of five) benchmarks for the development of education in Europe, the rate for adult participation in lifelong learning education still remains low compared to the EU average.<sup>4</sup>

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. Relevant legislation which has been introduced since the 2010 update is listed below:

- The Educational System Act of 7 September 1991 (Journal of Laws 2004 No. 256 item 2572 with subsequent amendments) – Act of 19 August 2011 amending the Educational System Act and other Acts (Journal of Laws 2011 No. 205 item 1206 with subsequent amendments);
- Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 24 February 2012 amending the regulation on rules and conditions of assessment, grading and promotion of pupils and students and conducting tests and examinations in public schools (Journal of Laws 2012 item 262);
- Regulation of the Minister of Education of 11 January 2012 on continuing education in non-school settings (Journal of Laws 2012 item 186);
- Regulation of the Minister of Education of 11 January 2012 on extramural exam (Journal of Laws 2012 item 188);
- Regulation of the Minister of Education of 14 September 2012 on journeyman exam, master exam and examination carried out by the examination boards of Chambers of Polish Craft Association (Journal of Laws 2012 item 1117).

Specific arrangements have been adopted in Polish legislation whereby professional/vocational skills acquired through employment can be validated through examinations leading to a qualification. The regulations from 2012 also introduced mechanisms for awarding partial qualifications in recognition of competences obtained as a result of completing training in a non-school setting; mechanisms also exist for recognising partial qualifications obtained in this way by adults who take up study in schools for adults providing Vocational Education and Training (VET).<sup>5</sup>

As explained in the 2010 update, the Polish authorities 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 on a lecture programme (teacher-oriented approach).<sup>6</sup> This shift is best demonstrated by the implementation in 2013 of a strategic document, the 'Perspective of lifelong learning', 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).<sup>7</sup>

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:

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<sup>4</sup> For instance, the rate reached 4.9% in 2005, 5.1% in 2007, 5.3% in 2010, 4.5% in 2011, and 4.5% in 2012. In comparison, the corresponding average for the European Union (27 countries) in 2005 - 2012 oscillates around 9% (Education and Training 2020: European benchmarks, <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/statistics-and-indicators/education-and-training-2020-benchmarks.aspx>).

<sup>5</sup> Ministry of National Education (2009), The 2009 Polish National Report on the Implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Programme: Work Programme, [http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/natreport09/poland\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/natreport09/poland_en.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> Wyrozębski, 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.ementor.edu.pl/30,651,Podejscie\\_do\\_tworzenia\\_programow\\_nauczania\\_oparte\\_na\\_efektach\\_ksztalcenia.html](http://www.ementor.edu.pl/30,651,Podejscie_do_tworzenia_programow_nauczania_oparte_na_efektach_ksztalcenia.html).

<sup>7</sup> Uchwała w sprawie przyjęcia dokumentu strategicznego „Perspektywa uczenia się przez całe życie”, <https://www.premier.gov.pl/wydarzenia/decyzje-rzadu/uchwala-w-sprawie-przyjecia-dokumentu-strategicznego-perspektywa-uczenia.html>.

- The Human Capital Operational Programme 2007-2013;
- Knowledge, Education, Development Operational Programme 2014-2020;
- The *National Development Strategy 2020*, adopted by the government in 2012, underlines the need to create a system for recognising and validating competencies acquired outside of the formal school system;
- The *Human Capital Development Strategy 2020*, adopted by the government in 2013, underlining the need to develop a national system of recognition of qualifications and validation, including the confirmation of the competences acquired outside formal education;
- The *Social Capital Development Strategy 2020*, adopted by the government in 2013, pointing to the need to support non-formal and informal education aimed at cooperation, creativity and social communication;
- The *Strategy for Innovation and Effectiveness of Economy 'dynamic Poland 2020'*, underlines the need to develop a non-formal and informal learning system;
- *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, developments taken and introduced at the European level have been included in Polish education and training policy and in the above-mentioned 'Lifelong learning Perspective'. Of particular note is the activity related to the establishment of an NQF. 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.<sup>8</sup> Although the NQF has not yet been introduced, the work on its design is being finalised in the year 2013 under the project, 'The development of terms of reference for the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework and the National Qualifications Register for lifelong learning' carried out by the Educational Research Institute within the framework of the Human Capital Operational Programme. The ERI team consists of 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. The new Polish Qualifications Framework model was presented for discussion with stakeholders in January 2010, following earlier expert proposals developed under the project 'Stocktaking of competences and qualifications for the Polish labour market and the development of National Qualifications Framework Model'. Poland presented the referencing report at the Advisory Group meeting in May 2013. Currently, the work on the development and implementation of the PQF and integrated qualifications register continues until mid 2015. As a part of the project, a system for the validation of learning outcomes acquired outside the formal system is currently being developed.<sup>9</sup>

To sum up the current situation, according to the current regulations, competences acquired outside formal education can be confirmed both in the education system and outside the system. Adults who are not school students are allowed to take external examinations, organised by the Regional Examination Boards. In this way one can confirm both the general qualifications (for example matura exam) and vocational qualifications in school professions. The latter can be confirmed also by the vocational examination after completing a non-formal qualifying training course. In Higher Education (HE), there are no general rules for the validation of learning outcomes achieved outside university. Formulation of such procedures is mainly up to each university, but the general rules concerning learning outcomes set by law must be observed. However, according to the proposal of the amendment of Higher Education Act the common rules of recognition of prior learning are going to be introduced in the sector. There are also a number of other procedures to confirm learning outcomes acquired outside formal education. It should be noted however, that these are not regulated in a systematic way. There are numerous different validation procedures, some of which

<sup>8</sup> Cedefop (2011) *Vocational Education and Training in Poland*.  
[http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/4105\\_en.pdf](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/4105_en.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.kwalifikacje.edu.pl/en/>.

have a relatively long tradition, others should be considered more as pilot projects which are designed not for the confirmation of competences on a large scale, but rather to develop and test new methods of validation in a specific regional, social or occupational context.<sup>10</sup>

## 2.2 Skills audits

Currently in Poland skills audits are carried out under the provisions of regulations on the Education system and on the Promotion of Employment and Institutions of the Labour Market. These fall under two different systems of career counselling. One system is organised within the formal education system, where the tasks associated with skills audits are generally carried out by the school professional counsellors and the psychological and pedagogical guidance services. It should be noted that the school system is aimed primarily at formal education, analysing the achievement of learning outcomes set by the curriculum and special educational needs. The services of school counsellors are open only for students of public and non-public schools. The second guidance system is operated by the district labour offices, where the tasks associated with skills audits are carried out by job counsellors. In this case, the services provided by counsellors are available for unemployed people and jobseekers who are registered with the employment office. This system should be considered more universal than the school system and targeted primarily on the analysis of competences and social skills in demand from employers. As a result of the skills audit, an unemployed person or job seeker receives an action plan including, inter alia, the scope of professional qualifications, skills and competencies that must be completed or acquired in order to find employment. These skills and competencies can be acquired both in the formal, informal and non-formal context. Skills audits can be also carried by the non-public employment agencies on the same basis as in the case of labour offices.

## 2.3 Relationship with qualifications framework and credit systems, and information on standards used for validation

### **Qualifications and qualifications frameworks**

The previous qualifications system in Poland had been based mainly on standards and criteria addressing the formal education process, which were defined by the content of education as well as the years of formal learning. Reform of the education system from the year 2012 has changed this model towards a system based on learning outcomes. This means that in the new system qualifications are granted on the basis of the validation of learning outcomes regardless of the cycle of education or the duration of training. This change is linked to the implementation of the Polish Qualifications Framework (PQF) that after its conclusion should result in a transformation of the education system into a learning outcomes-based system. The implementation of such developments has already taken place at all levels of education.<sup>11</sup> However it should be pointed out that the full system of the Qualifications Framework has not yet been introduced.

The experiences which led to the development of qualification standards for occupations (see below) together with the introduction of learning outcomes-based core curricula for general education<sup>12</sup> and the implementation of learning outcomes-based curricula for VET<sup>13</sup>, can be seen as building blocks for the establishment of 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

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<sup>10</sup> E. Bacia, *Jak potwierdzić kompetencje zdobyte na drodze pozaformalnej i nieformalnej?*, [http://www.bc.ore.edu.pl/Content/384/Trendy+4+z+2012\\_E.+Bacia.pdf](http://www.bc.ore.edu.pl/Content/384/Trendy+4+z+2012_E.+Bacia.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> 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).

<sup>12</sup> Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 23 December 2008 on the core curriculum in pre-school and general education in particular types of schools, Journal of Laws 2009 r. No 4 pos. 17.

<sup>13</sup> Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 7 February 2012 on the core curriculum for VET, Journal of Laws 2012 pos. 184.

and training system (2006-2008) undertaken by the Ministry of Education in cooperation with the Institute for Educational Research and the 'Cooperation Fund' Foundation. 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, a broad examination of qualifications and competences currently in use in Poland, as well as the methods used for their confirmation or validation has been carried out under the supervision of experts from the Educational Research Institute. Since 2008 the project "The development of terms of reference for the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework and the National Qualifications Register for lifelong learning" is carried out by the Educational Research Institute which is aiming to support implementation of the integrated qualifications system, including also validation of competences acquired in non-formal and informal learning. These works are going to be carried out by mid-2015, resulting in the implementation of a Polish Qualification Framework and an integrated qualifications register of the Polish system. From 2015 under the provisions of the *Knowledge, Education and Development Operational Programme*, the implementation phase of the PQF should commence.

### **Credit systems**

So far a credit system has been introduced in higher education (ECTS). The changes introduced in 2012 in VET are in line with the ECVET technical specifications included in the ECVET Recommendation. They specifically concern: using learning outcomes and units of learning outcomes, developing the learning programmes and assessment based on the LO, introducing procedures for credit accumulation and transfer and finally opening the path for validation of non-formal and informal learning.

A system for credit accumulation and transfer compatible with ECVET principles is being currently developed as an integral part of a Polish Qualifications Framework.

### **Standards**

In the case of Poland one can talk about several complementary systems of educational and professional standards, which however do not constitute a coherent system. In the case of the general and vocational education system educational standards are developed in the form of the core curriculum for general education and for individual occupations. The core curriculum is based on learning outcomes. Particular attention should be paid to the curriculum for vocational education, which includes 200 professions taught in the school system divided into 251 separate qualifications. Examination standards used in the Polish Craft Association are prepared on a similar basis as the core curriculum. Qualifications awarded in the school system and in the craft system are treated equally by the law. Higher education constitutes a separate system, for which the educational standards are set out in the form of a Qualifications Framework for Higher Education, which in a rather general way defines learning outcomes appropriate to the different levels of education and different fields of study. Both in the school system and in higher education learning outcomes are presented in terms of knowledge, skills, and social competences.

Regulated professions are a separate set of 'standards', which however do not form a uniform system. Their common feature is that the role of standard is played by the relevant regulation, which lays down the conditions which must be met in order to obtain the permission to carry out such a profession. In addition to these conditions, the rules also specify the examination procedures and validation rules, provided that it is required under the law.

Finally there are qualification standards for occupations (now renamed the standards of professional competences), developed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. These standards have not yet been linked to the NQF, but it is planned to do so in the future. The description of vocational qualification requirements does not take into account the ways of

acquiring qualifications, other than through formal education and vocational practice.<sup>14</sup> The Polish model of standards for vocational qualifications - inspired by the British qualifications system - is based on the concept of five levels of qualifications. The initiatives in this field have been carried out under the PHARE and ESF projects between 1998 and 2013, most recently under the *Human Capital Operational Programme* 'Development and dissemination of national vocational competence standards' in 2011-2013. . Through these projects, standards for 553 occupations were developed (out of which 300 were within the 2011-2013 project) and promoted among employers (initiated and coordinated by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy). While they cover the professions listed in the Polish classification of occupations, they provide more detailed and methodologically unified characteristics of occupational qualifications and competences. They also describe both the activities related to performing a particular profession as well as required or necessary knowledge, skills, and psychophysical competences. 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 interpretation information cited in standards, 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 of full implementation of the standards.<sup>15</sup>

Development of the integrated proposal of the credit and accumulation system is a part of activities carried out by Educational Research Institute in the project "The development of terms of reference for the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework and the National Qualifications Register for lifelong learning"

## 2.4 National institutional framework<sup>16</sup>

The establishment and implementation of rules, procedures, and an institutional setting for validation and recognition of qualifications acquired in a non-formal and informal learning context has been identified as one of the key elements of the prospective comprehensive Polish Qualifications System.<sup>17</sup> As explained in the 2010 update, when outlining the Polish NQF model, two types of validation framework were proposed:

- **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 a non-formal or informal setting (if learning outcomes for the study programme 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.

So far, provisions of the first model have been partially implemented. In the case of VET, validation of competences acquired outside the formal education system has been enabled.

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<sup>14</sup> Sztandar-Sztanderska, U. (2009) Polish Qualifications Framework and the labour 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.krak.org.pl/pl/publikacje2>.

<sup>15</sup> Raport z II badania wykorzystania krajowych standardów kwalifikacji zawodowych, <http://www.mpips.gov.pl/index.php?gid=502&>.

<sup>16</sup> 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.krak.org.pl/pl/publikacje2>.

<sup>17</sup> Cedefop (2011) *Vocational Education and Training in Poland*. [http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/4105\\_en.pdf](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/4105_en.pdf).

But the long term solution is going to be also partially based on the second model. It is planned to establish an institutional framework based on existing institutions responsible for validation, but also to develop common quality procedures and a wide use of accreditation and licensing procedures for existing processes. It is also planned to establish an integrated qualifications register.

The integrated register will include qualifications regardless of already existing qualifications registers and lists or those that will be created in the future in Poland as needed by specific departments, sectors, communities or institutions. An institution will be selected to operate the integrated qualifications register.

The information gathered in the integrated register will be made available through an Internet portal. The NQF Portal, as is the case with similar portals in other EU countries, will be linked to the European Qualifications Framework portal.

The integrated register will be a record of qualifications, which, in the initial stage of implementation, will include only full and partial qualifications established by public authorities or institutions authorised by them. These qualifications will be included in the register after their authorisation by a public authority (e.g., a competent minister) or a legally authorised entity. The entity operating the register, after obtaining specific information about these qualifications, will be entering them into the register (recording).

The concept of the integrated qualifications register provides the possibility of expanding the set of registered qualifications with those awarded by various organisations in the future.<sup>18</sup>

#### **Education and training providers:**

As explained in the 2010 update, the Polish system of validation and assessment of learning outcomes covers internal and external types of validation. While internal assessment is carried out by school teachers against the requirements which are defined by them on the basis of curricula, external validation is organised by the Central Examination Board (*Centralna Komisja Egzaminacyjna*, CKE) and eight District Examination Boards (*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 upper secondary school level (lyceum and technical school – ISCED level 3);
- examinations confirming vocational qualifications conducted in occupations that are included in the classification of vocational occupations (these exams have both a theoretical and a practical part – ISCED level 3);
- extra-mural exams for adults who may obtain graduation certificates from schools (on ISCED 1-3) without having to attend school in order to do so.

The latter type of examination can be considered as one of the key elements of the developing system of validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, as there is no requirement to attend school in order to attain the certificate.<sup>19</sup> Among other steps towards the validation system, the following examples could be also listed:

- 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 journeymen and masters organised by the Polish Craft Association;
- implementation in 2012 of the external exams acknowledging vocational qualifications of individuals who are not graduates of vocational schools;
- improving the external exams system with the aim of using them in the validation process.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Referencing Report. Referencing the Polish Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning to the European Qualifications Framework.

<sup>19</sup> Regulation of the Minister of Education of 11 January 2012 on extra-mural exam (Journal of Laws 2012 item 188).

<sup>20</sup> Ministry of National Education (2009) The 2009 Polish National Report on the Implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Programme.

In relation to continuing vocational training (CVT), particularly worth highlighting are the Continuing Education Centres (*Centrum Kształcenia Ustawicznego*, CKU), 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 the organisation of extra-mural 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. Alongside CKUs, non-public Vocational Training Centres (*Zakład Doskonalenia Zawodowego*, ZDZ) and public Practical Training Centres (*Centrum Kształcenia Praktycznego*, CKP) and Centres for Education and Professional Development (*Ośrodek Doskonalenia i Doskonalenia Zawodowego*, ODDZ) can organise and provide continuing education on a regular daily basis, in the extra-mural form and as distance learning.<sup>21</sup> In 2013, there were 166 Continuing Education Centres, 152 Practical Training Centres, 75 Centres for Education and Professional Development and 24 Vocational Training Centres operating all over the country.<sup>22</sup> These organisations provide training which adults can have validated through the external or extra-mural examinations.

### **Private sector actors (including social partners)**

As outlined in the 2010 update, 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 (Journal of Laws 1989 No. 17 item 92 with subsequent amendments) stipulates the conditions for carrying out examinations for craftsmen for the certificate of journeyman and master 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, 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 or 2).<sup>23</sup> The openness and accessibility of this track of examination for these two groups has been lately introduced into exams carried out by OKE, which corresponds 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.<sup>24</sup> 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 the banking, IT or construction sectors).

An example of a certification system in the IT sector is presented in a box below.

### **The European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL)<sup>25</sup>**

The ECDL certificate can be earned in 148 countries around the world and in one of 41 languages. The validation process is standardised and subject to quality assurance procedures. Rules for obtaining a certificate are determined by the ECDL Foundation of Ireland. In Poland, the certification process oversees Polish IT Society (PTI).

The learning outcomes required to obtain individual certificates are included in the ECDL syllabus

<sup>21</sup> FRSE (2012) *The system of Education in Poland*  
<http://www.eurydice.org/pl/sites/eurydice.org/pl/files/system2012.pdf>.

<sup>22</sup> <http://new.koweziu.edu.pl/cku-ckp>, [http://www.zdz.pl/index.php?file=Subpage&subpage\\_id=64](http://www.zdz.pl/index.php?file=Subpage&subpage_id=64).

<sup>23</sup> Regulation of the Minister of Education of 14 September 2012 on journeyman exam, master exam and examination carried out by the examination boards of Chambers of Polish Craft Association (Journal of Laws 2012 item 1117).

<sup>24</sup> PRISMA - Centre for Development Studies (2007) Euro-Validation. Lifelong Learning Validation for Sustainable Rural Development – A Good Practice Guide, available at: [http://www.euracademy.org/euro-validation/images/gpg-final%20eng\\_low.pdf](http://www.euracademy.org/euro-validation/images/gpg-final%20eng_low.pdf).

<sup>25</sup> <https://ecdl.pl/content/o-ecdl>.

available on the websites of the ECDL Foundation and all national operators (including PTI). The exams consist of a written test checking level of theoretical knowledge and a practical exam, aimed at a practical skills check.

Candidates take exams in ECDL authorised laboratories. Currently there are more than 1,000 laboratories in Poland grouped in about one hundred Examination Centres. The quality of these institutions is supervised by the Commission for the Quality of PTI, which verifies the conditions of the examinations in these institutions. If the conditions provided by the institutions are in accordance with the ECDL standards, the annual accreditation is granted.

Starting in 2013, a new form of certificates has been introduced, reflecting the technological changes and new requirements of the labour market. Key changes include increased flexibility of the programme, better adapted to the model of life-long learning and a greater range of certification modules. Greater flexibility of the programme is obtained by introducing the concept of the ECDL Profile that allows candidates to build a certification path that best suits their own needs or the needs of their employers. This way one can validate those skills that best fit the professional or educational profile. The new ECDL modules introduce three groups of modules, and additional modules: e-citizen (module for beginners) and EPP modules (Endorsed Product Programme), which (in Poland) include e-teacher, e-Officer and GIS. ECDL certificate profiles can contain any mixture of these modules, as long as there is at least one optional module BASE, STANDARD or ADVANCED.

### Third sector organisations

As noted in the 2010 update, the third sector in Poland is rather active in taking the initiative towards the validation of informal and non-formal learning. 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. An example of such a certificate is presented in the box below.

#### **Certified NGO trainers (STOP)<sup>26</sup>**

Members of the NGO Trainers Association can validate coaching competences in the field of planning and conducting training. Candidates may apply for a certificate at levels I, II or III. For each certificate requirements are defined, including a list of competences needed to acquire the relevant qualification level.

A person wishing to join the process of validation should complete a questionnaire, in which he or she describes coaching experience and gives the number of successful and completed trainings.

The most important step in the validation process is to provide training under supervision. The supervisor assesses both the training programme and the way it was carried out. After the supervision, the supervisor prepares the note and recommendation for the certification committee, which in case of doubt may ask the candidate for further clarification. To avoid irregularities in the validation process, the NGO Trainers Association has established standards of supervision.

The main objective of supervision is to support trainers in developing coaching skills. Additionally, in the process of certification, the supervision is aimed at:

- confirmation that the coach applying for a quality certificate of training can independently prepare and lead a workshop according to the requirements for the given certificate degree and prepare a summary of the workshop;
- checking the coaching competence set up in the Letter of Competence appropriate to each level of STOP certificate.

The supervision process includes:

- an introductory session, where a contract with a trainer is signed, assumptions and outline of the training is discussed and feedback is delivered to the candidate;
- a participatory session, where the supervisor takes part in a workshop carried out by the candidate, assessing by direct observation the coaching work;
- a closing session, where the training supervisor provides feedback to the candidate, in particular on the competencies required for the given level certificate.

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.stowarzyszeniestop.pl/>.

## 2.5 Governance and allocation of responsibilities

As explained in the 2010 update, responsibility for the Polish vocational education system is shared across several ministries. The Ministry for National Education is 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 (*podstawa programowa 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).

The current procedures for validation in VET are governed by the Minister of National Education, and in HE, by the Minister of Science and Higher Education. In VET, responsibilities are divided between District Examination Boards (responsible for validation and issuing certificates), directors of vocational schools (validation of partial learning outcomes) and chambers of Trade, responsible for the whole process of validation and issuing certificates in a system carried out by the Polish Craft Association. Four areas of validation in the Vet sector can be distinguished, together with various bodies that are responsible for them:

- the Central Examination Board (*Centralna Komisja Egzaminacyjna*, CKE) and eight District Examination Boards (*Okręgowa Komisja Egzaminacyjna*, OKE) in charge of examinations confirming vocational qualifications in the formal education system;
- the 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 bodies responsible at the central level for the institutional framework for VET and HE, including validation, as follows:

- The Minister for National Education, whose competences include formulation of policies concerning education, including general rules of validation of non-formal and informal learning;
- The Minister for Labour and Social Policy, who lays down conditions and procedures for attending training and other forms of vocational activation by unemployed people and job seekers;
- 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 and the area of recognition of education and qualifications (including rules of validation in HE);
- The Minister for Finance, who proposes the budget assumptions for a given budget year and tax allowances.<sup>27</sup>

In higher education, validation is carried out by the HEIs under the supervision of the minister.

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<sup>27</sup> Cedefop (2011) *Vocational Education and Training in Poland*.  
[http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/4105\\_en.pdf](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/4105_en.pdf).

## 2.6 Examples of national regional, local or EU funded initiatives

An example of one of the latest projects for the validation of competence is 'Business Academy 50 + - an innovative model of validation and updating of professional competence of persons aged 50+'.<sup>28</sup> This is an innovative pilot project, which runs from May 2012 to July 2014. The project is carried out by the 'Solidarity' Region of Gdańsk (trade union) in partnership with the Foundation for Economy (a non-governmental organisation aimed at the promotion of entrepreneurship, professional development of employees and prevention of unemployment) and ProFirma (a training and consulting company). The aim of the project is to develop and test an innovative model of validation and updating the professional competence of persons aged 50 and above in the Pomorskie voivodeship in occupations like selling and sales representative, in order to improve their adaptability and mobility. The project budget is PLN 1 606 941.91 (EUR 384,755.24). The final product of the project is going to be a complete model of validation and updating of competences, which will consist of:

- assessment of competences;
- individualised feedback on competence gaps;
- development and implementation of an individual professional development process, which corresponds to the diagnosed educational needs;
- validation and certification.

Currently 60 employed and unemployed people aged 50+ are taking part in the testing phase of the project. The validation process is based on a Development Centre methodology. This is one of the most advanced methods of assessing competences, including interviews, document reviews, tests and performing practical tasks in a professional environment. Participation in the project should result in positive results in the area of participants' motivation for professional development.

Another example of a competence validation project is 'Model validation of competences for employees of SMEs of Wielkopolska municipal sector'.<sup>29</sup> The main objective of the project is to develop by the end of August 2013 innovative solutions for the validation of competences and skills to support employers and employees of SMEs of Wielkopolska municipal sector undergoing adaptation and modernisation. The validation model has been designed in collaboration with a transnational partner (The European Centre of Employers and Enterprises providing Public services, CEEP) by the National Chamber of Commerce (KIG). The project budget is PLN 1 621 650.00 (EUR 388 215.60).

The project has developed a comprehensive model of validation through the following activities:

- designing and implementing mechanisms of accreditation and registration of authorities validating competencies and skills of selected occupations in the Wielkopolska municipal sector;
- creating a database of competences and skills of women in the Wielkopolska municipal sector;
- carrying out the promotion of documenting competences acquired through informal education among executives and managers of the municipal sector;
- designing principles and models of validation.

The target group for the project were executives, managers and supervisors and employees of SMEs of Wielkopolska municipal sector who can benefit from using validation of competences in authorised institutions, and who will be able to catalogue their competences to prepare development plans. This also applies to women, as a group, who receive additional support in the project.

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, universities

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<sup>28</sup> <http://www.akademiahandlowa.pl/>.

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.walidacja.kig.pl/index.php/pl/>.

in Poland are now obliged to use the 'Europass - Supplement to the Diploma' and since 2006 the 'Europass - Certificate Supplement' has been provided by District Examination Boards to people who hold a diploma confirming vocational qualifications.<sup>30</sup> Since 2012 the 'Europass - Certificate Supplement' has also been issued by the Polish Craft Association.

## 2.7 Inputs, outputs and outcomes

### 2.7.1 Funding

As in 2010, resources for the validation of non-formal learning may come from:

- state and local government budgets which are being used to fund education,
- special-purpose funds: e.g. the Labour Fund, State Fund for the 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.

Generally, validation processes carried out within VET and HE are financed from the state budget, Labour Fund or State Fund for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons. Validation carried out outside of VET and HE is financed from the other sources in the above list.

Particularly worth highlighting are the operational programmes (OPs) financed from ESF such as the Human Capital OP (2007-2013) and new Knowledge, Education, Development OP (2014-2020). They have contributed to boosting different forms of non-formal and informal learning as well as continuing educational courses for various groups of participants that developed as part of projects carried out under those programmes. These initiatives are generally free of charge for participants. The human and technical resources required for their implementation are usually financed both by EU funds and the project partners who provide their contribution in the form of non-cash assets and resources.<sup>31</sup> It should be mentioned that the systemic projects concerning the development of validation system are financed by the ESF. 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, provided they are registered as unemployed or as a jobseeker. Employers, who hire a person through the labour offices, can also apply for the reimbursement of the examination fee of the new worker.

### 2.7.2 Distribution of costs

At the time of writing there are no studies regarding the costs generated by the validation process to organisations or individuals in Poland. In general, education at schools, where public administration (at any level, in case of VET either district or voivodeship) 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 non-public schools, the learners are obliged to pay for the tuition. In the case of the examination held by the Polish Craft Association, it is either financed by the learner or by public funds at the disposal of local authorities. As for the training organised by the public employment services (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.

Outside the school system, education is financed either from funds generated by the project in most cases financed from ESF, by the employer or from students' own financial resources.

It should be noted that there are no special tax incentives for organisations or individuals.

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<sup>30</sup> In 2011, 170 267 Europass Certificate Supplements and in 2010, 4 912 Europass Mobility documents were issued, [http://europass.frse.org.pl/sites/europass.org.pl/files/2011\\_wykresy\\_sdpkz.pdf](http://europass.frse.org.pl/sites/europass.org.pl/files/2011_wykresy_sdpkz.pdf).

<sup>31</sup> Refernet (2009) *Notatka informacyjna - Kształcenie dorosłych* [Adult education – a memorandum]. Central Statistical Office (GUS), Warszawa.

### 2.7.3 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 moderate demand for validation of non-formal and informal learning within the professions targeted by these projects. It should be also noted that these projects usually cover rather small groups of individuals, compared to the number of graduates of vocational schools (around 170,000 annually)<sup>32</sup> or graduates from the craft system (50,000 examinations annually).<sup>33</sup> To give an example: 60 candidates signed up for the 'Business Academy 50 + - an innovative model of validation and updating of professional competence of persons 50+' project and received a formal confirmation of their competences.

According to the report published by the Central Examination Board in 2013 (the first year in which the examinations were carried out on the basis of the new core curriculum for vocational education) the qualifications diploma (which is awarded to people who pass the external or extra-mural examinations) received 60.03% of all the candidates who take part in the vocational exam. On average, the theoretical vocational exam was passed by 88% of candidates, while the practical part was passed by 66% of candidates. Over the period 2010-2013 there has been an increase of 11 % in the number of students/applicants taking the vocational exam (this includes learners who have undertaken both formal (school) and non-formal (extra-mural) learning), from 230 267 graduates in 2010 to 255 874 graduates in 2013. It is worth mentioning that in the case of candidates taking the new examination in the extra-mural form, the pass rate was 100%.<sup>34</sup>

With regard to the crafts examinations, data has been published separately since 2010 by each craft chamber which delivers VET. It is not possible within the scope of this report to prepare aggregate figures but it is estimated that the pass rate of the vocational examination in the crafts system is around 90 %.<sup>35</sup>

### 2.7.4 Evidence of benefits to individuals

Building on the experience of the validation projects it can be said that a key benefit to individuals of participating in a validation initiative is an opportunity to confirm their skills and obtain a certificate without bearing any costs. Other important factors include the possibility to increase employment opportunities, a positive impact on the participants' self-esteem and fulfilling their desire to improve their competences. It can therefore be concluded that the validation of competences helps to stimulate the need for further education among participants. At the same time, the employers involved in the projects have easy access to people who declared their willingness to be employed having successfully validated their competences.

Some interesting data on benefits to individuals can be extracted from the report of the GUS on participation in non-formal training. According to the research results, the most important reason among the respondents for participating in training is to improve the quality of their work or career development (60.4%). This objective was largely achieved, as evidenced by benefits received by participants undertaking non-formal education. The most frequently cited example of benefits for participants was improvement of job performance (45.6% of the participants). Among other benefits associated with work, respondents indicated the

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<sup>32</sup> According to the data provided by the Central Examination Board, in the case of the school sector the number of validation applications by individuals has increased by around 11% over the period 2010-2013, from 230 267 graduates in 2010 to 255 874 graduates in 2013. <http://www.cke.edu.pl/index.php/egzamin-y-zawodowe-left/informacje-o-wynikach>.

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<http://www.zrp.pl/Dzia%C5%82ano%C5%9B%C4%87ZRP/O%C5%9Bwiatazawodowa/Dzia%C5%82alno%C5%9B%C4%87egzaminacyjna/tabid/70/language/pl-PL/Default.aspx>.

<sup>34</sup> Centralna Komisja Egzaminacyjna (2013), *Informacja wstępna o wynikach egzaminu potwierdzającego kwalifikacje w zawodzie, który odbył się w roku szkolnym 2012/2013*, [http://www.cke.edu.pl/images/files/zawodowe/informacje\\_o\\_wynikach/2013/informacja\\_wstepna\\_o\\_wynikach\\_nowego\\_egzaminu\\_2013.pdf](http://www.cke.edu.pl/images/files/zawodowe/informacje_o_wynikach/2013/informacja_wstepna_o_wynikach_nowego_egzaminu_2013.pdf).

<sup>35</sup> *Informacje z działalności oświatowej za rok 2009*, Związek Rzemiosła Polskiego, Warszawa 2010.

inclusion of new duties (13.4%), an increase in salary (4.4%) and promotion (2.0%). Women more frequently than men pointed out the benefits in private life (25.6% compared with 18.2% of men). Comparing the urban area with rural areas it can be said, respondents from cities said that training more frequently contributed to better job performance (47.8% compared to 39.7% village inhabitants) and other work-related benefits (for example: obtaining a new job, career advancement, higher salary, take up of new duties). Answers given by respondents indicate that often the main motive for undertaking learning activities was obtaining a certificate. It should be pointed out that more than 71% of the respondents obtained a certificate after completion of the course. For almost half of the respondents the certification was required by the employer or by law.<sup>36</sup>

### **3 Information, advice and guidance**

#### **3.1 Awareness-raising and recruitment**

At a project level the validation process usually addresses a specific group of people with experience in certain areas (e.g. in baking, construction, etc) and the recruitment process is supported by promotion in the press, radio, television and social media. The validation process is usually 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 also provides relevant information and instructions related to the exam and certification.

In the case of the validation of informal learning carried out by the chambers of crafts and Regional Examination Boards, the recruitment process is based on the following: information posted on the websites of the validating institutions; and information provided by the teachers, trainers and professional counsellors (working with labour market agencies) and by school professional counsellors.

However, direct contact 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 VET institutions in a local or regional labour market is the most effective form of recruitment or promotion of validation.

#### **3.2 Role of information, advice and guidance networks/institutions**

Information about the process of validation of non-formal and informal learning at the current stage is not too extensive and the discussion on the issue remains mostly limited to groups of specialists and educators. It is a fairly new element in the Polish educational system that still requires wide dissemination. The validation system should be interrelated with vocational guidance and information structures, which might be a challenge for vocational advisers, as there is no directly accessible information on this topic.

Within the school system, each student has the possibility to get additional support from professionals such as a teacher, a methodical adviser, a psychologist and a professional counsellor. Outside the school system support is targeted at unemployed people and jobseekers registered at employment offices or in non-public employment agencies. In other situations, individuals have to organise guidance and support on their own and with their own funds. Some useful information is also available on the Internet portal of the Central Examination Board, Polish Craft Association and Voluntary Labour Corps.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Central Statistical Office (2011) Adult education, Warsaw, [http://www.stat.gov.pl/cps/rde/xbcr/gus/ED\\_ksztalcenie\\_doroslych\\_2011.pdf](http://www.stat.gov.pl/cps/rde/xbcr/gus/ED_ksztalcenie_doroslych_2011.pdf).

<sup>37</sup> The Voluntary Labour Corps (OHP) is a state organization. The primary objective of OHP is to create adequate conditions for proper social and vocational development of young people, including special actions that are targeted on disadvantaged young people who are supported by OHP and such support consists in organizations of various forms involved in the key issues of tackling poverty, unemployment, and social pathology effects.

### 3.3 Measures to enhance the awareness of validation initiatives and practices amongst guidance practitioners

Currently the issue of improving awareness of validation amongst guidance practitioners is directly linked to educational reforms and the implementation of the Polish Qualifications Framework. In education, the main means of dissemination of the relevant information are publications, seminars for guidance practitioners and internet portals of the Ministry of National Education, the Central Examination Board, the National Centre for Supporting Vocational and Continuing Education (KOWEziU)<sup>38</sup> and the Centre for Education Development<sup>39</sup>. In the case of job counsellors working in employment offices, the main source of information is the Internet portal of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and the Portal of Public Employment Services. Individual employment offices and non-public employment agencies can also provide guidance and training for guidance practitioners on the topic of validation, but it is not a systemic solution.

## 4 Quality assurance and evaluation

### 4.1 Quality Assurance Framework

The issue of quality in validation has been treated very seriously over the past few years. It is a key concern about the implementation of educational reform and the implementation of the Polish Qualifications Framework. However, so far there is no systemic solution concerning quality assurance in all contexts of vocational education. Work is currently underway to develop such a systemic solution for all learning areas. The system is going to list characteristics of credentials (diplomas, certificates, licenses, permissions, etc.) awarded in Poland together with a description of the procedures applied during the process of granting these (admission, evaluation, validation, quality assurance). The quality assurance system is going to be a key element of the qualification system and a necessary condition for proper and effective implementation of the Polish NQF. In the currently developing system, the most important measures to ensure quality relate to the qualification itself<sup>40</sup>, credibility of the validation and confirmation of the qualification and credibility of the institutions responsible for validation and certification of competences. The quality assurance measures are going to be managed by the following institutions: validating, examining and certifying bodies, and also by external agencies ensuring the quality of qualifications. Also the quality of the education (teaching and learning) is an integral element of educational management and has an impact on the quality of qualifications.<sup>41</sup>

### 4.2 Quality assurance systems/procedures

As a result of recent educational reforms based on experiences from various validation projects, a methodology for the validation process has already been developed for certain professions, together with corresponding quality requirements to ensure the credibility of the

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<sup>38</sup> KOWEziU is a central, public, national-level institution providing professional development services for teachers subject to the Ministry of National Education. The mission of the Centre is to inspire, prepare and coordinate activities related to professional development of teachers from vocational schools and schools for adults and to prepare and execute educational ventures related to the stages of educational transformation in Poland.

<sup>39</sup> The Centre for Education Development (ORE) is a national teacher training institution. The main objectives of the Centre include: actions for quality assurance in education, particularly through supporting schools and educational institutions in carrying out their statutory tasks and support of changes in the system of education in the field of teachers' professional development.

<sup>40</sup> The quality of qualification itself means, among others, that the qualification meets needs, particularly of learners and the labour market and is well described, -for example its description includes comprehensive information on its required learning outcomes. Sławiński S., Dębowski H., Chłoń-Domińczak A., Kraśniewski A., Pierwienińska R., Stęchły W., Ziewiec G. (2013), Raport referencyjny. *Odniesienie Polskiej Ramy Kwalifikacji na rzecz uczenia się przez całe życie do Europejskiej Ramy Kwalifikacji*, Institute for Educational Research.

<sup>41</sup> Sławiński S., Dębowski H., Chłoń-Domińczak A., Kraśniewski A., Pierwienińska R., Stęchły W., Ziewiec G. (2013), Raport referencyjny. *Odniesienie Polskiej Ramy Kwalifikacji na rzecz uczenia się przez całe życie do Europejskiej Ramy Kwalifikacji*, Institute for Educational Research.

certificates. These measures could also be applied to other vocational areas. The quality requirements for the process of validating informal competences tend to result from the compliance with the quality policy applied by a certain institution carrying out the validation process.

In the school system, the quality assurance provisions of validation of learning outcomes are supervised by the Central Examination Board, and in the case of a validation process, by Regional Examination Boards. The quality assurance systems consist of formal requirements for the examiners, rules of work for the examination committee and procedures for conducting examinations. External examinations are carried out on the basis of the curriculum for vocational education, including 251 separate qualifications extracted from 200 occupations. This is in accordance with the principles set out in the regulation of the Minister of National Education of 24 February 2012 amending the regulation on rules and conditions of assessment, grading and promotion of pupils and students and conducting tests and examinations in public schools (Journal of Laws 2012 item 262).

In the case of craft examinations, the same quality assurance procedures are applied to both journeyman and master's diplomas. The requirements for examination committee members to possess certain formal qualifications are seen as a means of quality assuring the validation process. The committee members are appointed for a term of four years. After the appointment members of the committee take part in training organised by craft chambers concerning the examination methodology, procedural rules, the committee's work and the conduct of exams. According to the principle of external examinations, exams take place outside the company in which the candidate works and his/her trainer (in the case of the craft system also an employer) cannot take part in the examination committee. The exams are based on uniform examination standards. In addition to the standards, regular meetings of chairs of the examination committees are organised, aimed at establishing a common range of examination topics, setting practical tasks, sets of theoretical questions etc<sup>42</sup>.

Existing standards for validation procedures require further development. The description of quality assurance procedures for validation of competences and awarding qualifications are going to be the key feature of the new Polish Qualification Framework. The separation of training and assessment bodies is the key principle guiding both validation and the examination process as a whole. Quality 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, for example practitioners or representatives of employers and other stakeholders.

### **4.3 Evaluation framework**

Currently there is no national framework for evaluation. The individual projects financed by the ESF are evaluated on a regular basis. The minimal requirement for such a project is an ex-post evaluation and in the case of larger projects, there is also a requirement to carry out an ex-ante and on-going evaluation. For school-based education, a systemic internal and external evaluation is carried out on a regular basis, but this process does not concern the validation process, which is organised by the Regional Examination Boards.

## **5 Validation methods**

### **5.1 Methods used and the validation process**

As indicated in the 2010 update, the most common validation method applied in Poland is a mixed approach. It usually consists of an examination in the form of a test of work activity, based on checking the practical skills, accompanied by a theoretical part (either written or oral examination). Other methods that can be used to validate competences include:

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<http://www.zrp.pl/Dzia%C5%82ano%C5%9B%C4%87ZRP/O%C5%9Bwiatazawodowa/Dzia%C5%82alno%C5%9B%C4%87egzaminacyjna/tabid/70/language/pl-PL/Default.aspx>.

- 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 the type of competences, validation can also take the form of a probationary period.

A good illustration of the typical validation process is the examination carried out by the craft chambers. A candidate for a journeyman's exam can use one of the following seven paths, taking into account his or her education, professional qualifications and period of practice of occupation which is going to be examined:

- completed journeyman training;
- completed training in an occupation outside the school system;
- completed training for adults;
- three years of performance of the occupation, which is examined;
- secondary school leaving certificate, or other secondary school providing vocational education associated with the profession, which is examined;
- professional degree in the relevant profession falling within the scope of the occupation, which is examined and after gaining a degree, at least six-months practice in the profession which is going to be examined;
- certificate of completed examination or qualification certificate<sup>43</sup> and at least one year of practice in the profession which is going to be examined;

In addition, each candidate has to have a lower secondary school diploma. In the case of a master's degree there are six possible paths, taking into account education, professional qualifications and period of practice in the relevant occupation which is going to be examined:

- certificate of journeyman or equivalent in the profession and a three-year period of practice in the profession which is going to be examined;
- at least six years professional experience in the occupation which is going to be examined;
- certificate of journeyman or equivalent in a profession which is related to the profession which is going to be examined and following the exam, a three-year period of practice;
- master's diploma in a profession which is related to the profession which is going to be examined and following the exam, a one-year period of practice;
- secondary general school leaving certificate or other secondary school certificate providing vocational education associated with the profession which is going to be examined, and two years of professional experience after obtaining a certificate;
- tertiary school degree in the specialisation that falls within the scope of the profession which is going to be examined, and following at least one year of professional experience.

Master diploma candidates must have completed at least upper secondary education. The vocational exam is divided into practical and theoretical parts. During the practical test candidates perform tasks to verify their practical skills. Tasks are set by the examination committee on the basis of the examination standard according to the level of journeyman or master in the particular profession. Assessment of the results of the practical test is conducted by members of the examination committee according to criteria approved by the Polish Craft Association. The theoretical exam is divided into two parts: a written exam answering questions about seven themes for journeyman (professional accounting, business documentation, CAD, the rules and principles of health and safety at work, the basic principles of environmental protection, basic labour laws and basic issues in the field business management) and nine themes for master (cited above plus the basics of

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<sup>43</sup> Until 2012 it was possible to obtain a qualification certificate or certificate of completed vocational examination organised by the craft chambers' examination boards. Under this system it was possible to obtain a qualification in any occupation included in the Polish classification of occupations. The main problem with this examination was connected with the virtual absence of any educational standards for these professions and in the 2011 reform, these examinations were abolished.

psychology and pedagogy and teaching methodology). The oral part of the exam consists of answering questions concerning three themes: technology, theory of machines and materials science. Questions are open and developed on the basis of examination standards.<sup>44</sup>

It is also worth mentioning that in the case of vocational examinations carried out by Regional Examination Boards, it is possible to pass the theoretical examination using an electronic system. Such an examination lasts 60 minutes and consists of a test containing 40 closed tasks, each containing four answer choices, of which only one answer is correct.<sup>45</sup>

The most commonly used methods at the different stages of the validation process (identification, documentation and assessment of competences) are illustrated in the table below.

	Identification	Documentation	Assessment
Debate			
Declarative methods			
Interview			
Observation			✓
Portfolio method	✓	✓	
Presentation			
Simulation and evidence extracted from work			
Tests and examinations			✓
Other (e.g. e-learning methods) – please specify:	✓ Document analysis	✓ Document analysis	

It should be noted that theoretically it could be difficult for candidates to pass external vocational examinations (*egzamin potwierdzający kwalifikacje zawodowe*) without having attended formal education/training, even for a specialist in a certain profession, if s/he 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. This situation has been changed by the recent reform of the education system.

## 6 Validation practitioners

### 6.1 Profile of validation practitioners

The vast majority of examiners who are entitled to conduct the validation of learning outcomes are from the formal education system or from the craft system. In the case of examiners appointed by Regional Examination Boards (formal system) almost all are vocational teachers and instructors of practical training. In the case of examiners from craft

<sup>44</sup> Kossakowska J. *Walidacja na przykładzie kwalifikacji czeladnika i mistrza w rzemiośle*, [http://biblioteka-krk.ibe.edu.pl/opac\\_css/doc\\_num.php?explnum\\_id=331](http://biblioteka-krk.ibe.edu.pl/opac_css/doc_num.php?explnum_id=331).

<sup>45</sup> Centralna Komisja Egzaminacyjna (2012), *Procedury organizowania i przeprowadzania egzaminu potwierdzającego kwalifikacje w zawodzie w 2013 roku*.

chambers, they are predominantly entrepreneurs and practitioners, often acting also as vocational and academic teachers and instructors of practical training. In the case of other non-formal and informal learning practices, examiners are usually authorised representatives of the given profession, as in the case of the regulated professions.

## 6.2 Provision of training and support to validation practitioners

A formalised system of support for examiners is organised within the school system (mandatory courses for examiners conducted by Regional Examination Boards), the craft system (mandatory training for members of the examination committees led by the chambers of crafts) and the system of regulated professions, where the type of training for examiners is determined in each case by law for each specific regulated profession. The situation is different in the case of validation projects where training for examiners is either run by the project contractor or (which is a more typical situation) the project involves professional examiners from school or craft systems.

## 6.3 Qualifications requirements

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.<sup>46</sup>

In the case of projects concerning 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 the specific field, as well as members of external examination commissions confirming vocational skills through formal education. More specifically, the examination committee members should usually satisfy the following requirements and possess:

- knowledge of qualification standards in the given 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 requirements are often desirable:

- practical experience in assessing knowledge and skills;
- 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.

It should be noted however, that these requirements are mandatory only for the validation practitioners taking part in a specific project. As for qualification requirements for validation practitioners in the formal education system – who can be involved in validating competences acquired also outside the formal education system – they are specified in the Educational System Act of 7 September 1991 (Journal of Laws 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:

- have qualifications required for appointment as a school teacher in the examined qualification or a university teacher specialising in the areas which fall within the scope of the examination;

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<sup>46</sup> Information on regulated professions can be found at:  
[http://www.nauka.gov.pl/q2/oryginal/2013\\_05/2fc90959252ab275bd526f0254718d89.pdf](http://www.nauka.gov.pl/q2/oryginal/2013_05/2fc90959252ab275bd526f0254718d89.pdf).

- have at least three years of teaching experience in a public or private school or higher school or at least three years' experience in a position requiring teaching qualifications in the teachers education institution, the public authority, the school-board or authority conducting pedagogical supervision;
- 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 Board, completed with the knowledge of the principles for conducting and evaluating tests and exams.

A person who meets the following criteria can also work as an examiner carrying out the qualification examination in the profession:

- is a representative of employers or an employers' organisation or professional association;
- 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;
- successfully finish a training course for examiners, organised by a District Examination Board.

In the case of members of the examination committee appointed by the craft chambers, the requirements for examiners include:

- Chairman of the examination committee: higher education and six years of professional experience in the given profession, in the case of unique occupations requirements are as follows:
  - upper secondary education and master diploma with 3 years of professional experience or
  - upper secondary education and technician diploma with 6 years of professional experience or
  - basic vocational education, master diploma with 6 years of professional experience.
- Members of the examination committee:
  - basic vocational education and master diploma with 3 years of professional experience or
  - upper secondary education and technician diploma with 6 years of professional experience or
  - entry in the register of examiners in accordance with the principles laid down in the Education System Act (same as in the case of examiners appointed by the Regional Examination Boards).

All members of the examination committees (including the chair) must have pedagogical training (at least the title of practical training instructor) and have completed training for members of the committee. In addition, members of the examination committee cannot be members of the statutory authority of the craft chamber which carry out particular examinations and cannot maintain any legal or factual connection with the candidate that may raise justifiable doubts as to impartiality.

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