

NQF-IN Project:

“Developing organisational and financial models for including non-formal sector qualifications in National Qualifications Frameworks”

Including non-formal sector qualifications in the National Qualifications Framework in Poland

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Table of contents

Foreword	4
1 Historical context	8
2 The Integrated Qualifications System – basic premises.....	10
3 Institutional setting.....	17
4 Types and legal status of qualifications included in the NQF	20
5 Procedures of the inclusion of qualifications in the NQF	26
6 Quality assurance of qualifications included in the NQF	36
7 Costs of including non-formal sector qualifications in the NQF	44
8. Current debates on further NQF developments	47
Annexes	60

Foreword

This country report was prepared for the NQF-IN project: *Developing organisational and financial models for including non-formal sector qualifications in National Qualifications Frameworks* financed by the European Union within the framework of the Erasmus+ funds.

The NQF-IN project corresponds with policy learning and policy transfer initiatives advocated in the EU, which focus on the exchange of ideas, policies and policy instruments among different national qualifications systems. The main rationale for this project is the assumption that knowledge about policies in one national system may be used for the benefit of developing policies in another system (Dolowitz, Marsch 2000, Chakroun 2010).

The aim of the NQF-IN project is to provide evidence-based support to national governments, EU agencies and key stakeholders in developing policies for including qualifications in national qualifications frameworks, with a particular focus on qualifications awarded outside the formal education system (*non-formal sector* qualifications). This aim will be achieved by conducting two sets of activities in the project: (1) providing systematised knowledge about the organisational and financial solutions applied in seven EU countries for including non-formal sector qualifications in their NQFs, and (2) developing organisational and financial models for the inclusion of non-formal sector qualifications in NQFs.

Within the NQF-IN project, we collected the experiences of seven European countries that are at different stages of NQF implementation: Croatia, Czech Republic, France, Hungary, Ireland, Poland and Scotland. Each NQF-IN project partner prepared a country report that describes the systemic solutions used to include non-formal sector qualifications in the NQF. This report for Poland is one of the seven country reports produced within this project. Based on an analysis of the content of country reports and national solutions, the NQF-IN project aims to develop organisational and financial models of the inclusion of non-formal sector qualifications in NQFs.

In order to ensure that country reports refer to the same set of themes in a comparable way, we developed a methodology of preparing country reports consisting of basic terms and concepts as well as a report structure. Each of the seven reports is structured according to the following chapters:

- Chapter 1. Historical context
- Chapter 2. National qualifications framework– basic premises
- Chapter 3. Institutional setting
- Chapter 4. Types and legal status of qualifications included in the NQF
- Chapter 5. Procedures of the inclusion of qualifications in the NQF
- Chapter 6. Quality assurance of qualifications included in the NQF
- Chapter 7. Costs of including qualifications in the NQF
- Chapter 8. Current debates on further NQF developments.

More information about the methodology of preparing country reports and the NQF-IN project outcomes can be found at the project's website www.nqf-in.eu.

Abbreviations and acronyms

EQA – external quality assurance

EQAI - external quality assurance institution

EQF – European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning

IBE – Educational Research Institute, Warsaw

IQA – internal quality assurance

IQR – Integrated Qualifications Registry

IQS – Integrated Qualifications System

NQF – national qualifications framework

PQF – Polish Qualifications Framework

Explanation of the basic terms used in the report

Archival qualification – a qualification in the IQS which is „inactive” due to its being out-of-date, and is no longer awarded within the IQS.

Awarding body/certifying institution – an institution authorized to award specific qualifications.

External quality assurance institution – an entity authorized by the relevant minister for a qualification to assess the quality assurance system of certifying institutions. The external quality assurance institution is in no way related to any certifying institution that it may be authorized to assessing.

Formal education – learning within the framework of programmes leading to an awarded full or partial qualification, provided by an institution operating on the basis of legal regulations governing the general, vocational and higher education systems.

Formal general and vocational education (*system oświaty*) – the Polish national education system is divided into “*system oświaty*” and higher education. Many documents on Polish education translate the term “*system oświaty*” into “education system”. From the perspective of this report, such terminology lacks precision for two reasons: it does not refer directly to vocational education and may suggest that it also includes higher education. For this reason, “*system oświaty*” is being translated in this report as “the formal general and vocational education system”.

Full qualification – qualifications awarded solely by the formal general, vocational and higher education systems, after the learner has achieved the learning outcomes required for the qualifications attained in specific stages of education.

Integrated Qualifications System – a separate part of the national qualifications system governed by the regulations of the Act on the Integrated Qualifications System. Qualifications that are not included in the integrated qualifications system may function in Poland. However, such qualifications are not assigned a PQF level and cannot be entered into the Integrated Qualifications Register.

Integrated Qualifications Register – the publicly accessible, national register of qualifications in the IQS. Qualifications included in the IQS are entered into the IQR regardless of whether they also exist in other registers (lists, catalogues) administered by other ministries, economic sector organisations, communities or institutions.

Internal quality assurance – the monitoring and periodic evaluation of the activities carried out by certifying institutions related to awarding qualifications.

Informal learning – attaining knowledge, skills and competences through various means other than organised learning (formal or non-formal education systems). Informal learning can include: autonomous self-learning (e.g. foreign language, computer skills); learning through

other activities – while at work, performing household duties, developing a hobby, etc. (learning outcomes then become an added value of the activities undertaken, which are not carried out with the intention of learning).

Market qualification – a qualification not regulated by legal regulations, developed by various communities (social organisations, associations, corporations or other groups) on the basis of their experiences. All market qualifications included in the IQS are categorized as partial qualifications.

National qualifications system – all of the solutions implemented to develop and award qualifications and ensure their quality.

Non-formal education – organised institutional learning in the form of programmes that are not part of a formal education system. The education programmes of non-formal education do not have to lead to the attainment of a qualification. Qualifications awarded through non-formal education can be included in the IQS (and be assigned a PQF level).

Partial qualification – all qualifications in the IQS that are not full qualifications.

Qualification – a defined set of learning outcomes, defined according to established standards, whose attainment has been formally confirmed by an authorized institution.

Regulated qualification – a qualification established by legal regulations awarded outside the formal general, vocational and higher education systems. Regulated qualifications may, but do not have to, be included in the IQS. The relevant minister for the qualification decides whether it is to be included in the IQS. All regulated qualifications in the IQS are partial qualifications.

Relevant minister – the minister responsible for a specific area of government administration within which a given regulated and/or market qualification functions.

Suspended qualification – a qualification in the IQS which is momentarily „inactive” and cannot be awarded because of the temporary lack of an authorized certifying institution.

1 Historical context

Work on the national qualifications framework started in Poland already in 2006 when the minister responsible for higher education appointed the Working Group for the NQF for Higher Education, assigning it the task of preparing an initial model of the framework (see: Marciniak 2014 et al.).

In October 2008, the Minister of Education appointed a team of experts recommending the preparation of a draft model of a Polish qualifications framework. (Chmielecka et al. 2010). The team which included experts representing different educational sectors prepared a concept of the national qualifications framework and preliminary guidelines for its implementation.

In 2010, the Prime Minister appointed the *Inter-ministerial Taskforce for lifelong learning, including the National Qualifications Framework* in order to manage work on the Polish Qualifications Framework at the governmental level. This Taskforce was led by the Ministry of Education. At the same time, the Minister of Education commissioned the Educational Research Institute (IBE) to prepare wide-ranging proposals for the continued development and implementation of the Polish Qualifications Framework and to prepare the Referencing Report (see Sławiński, Dębowski et al. 2013). This task was carried out within the framework of an EFS funded¹ project: *The development of terms of reference for the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework and the National Qualifications Register for lifelong learning*, implemented from June 2010 to November 2015. From January 2013 to November 2015, this project was accompanied by two supplementary projects, also financed from ESF funds: *Developing the national qualifications system – organising and institutionalising the Integrated Qualifications Register* and *Developing the national qualifications system – pilot implementation of the national qualifications system and its promotional campaign*.²

As a result three systemic ESF-funded projects were carried out by IBE in 2013-2015 to support the Ministry of Education and the Polish government in the work on the design of systemic solutions legal acts implementing the integrated qualifications system, including the NQF. Within the scope of these projects, the main components of the qualifications system in Poland were developed: level descriptors of the NQF, qualifications standards and levelling procedures, standards for quality assurance, validation and credit accumulation and transfer. An important part of the projects was to develop and promote the use of a common terminology, defined in a glossary of the most important terms related to the qualifications system (Sławiński ed. 2013 Sławiński ed. 2015, Sławiński 2016).

The concept of the national qualifications framework was described in the Referencing Report, presented, after governmental approval, to the EQF Advisory Group of the European Commission in May 2013. The concept of the NQF reflected the reforms in higher, general and vocational education that began in the late 1990s, including the most important shift in the 2010s of basing education on learning outcomes. As a result of these reforms, the approach of

¹ Human Capital Operational Programme, Priority III, Measure 3.4, Sub-measure 3.4.1.

² Human Capital Operational Programme, Priority III, Measure 3.4, Sub-measure 3.4.1.

developing qualifications that takes into account learning outcomes, their transfer, validation and quality assurance in accordance with European standards was introduced to the entire formal education system before the PQF was established, and provided the foundation for its implementation (Referencing Report 2013).

Since the beginning of the work on the NQF in Poland it was assumed that in order to be a policy driver, the NQF had to be complemented by other elements of the qualifications system, including, among others: a standard for describing qualifications, quality assurance and validation procedures, credit accumulation and transfer principles. Therefore the reformative works were not only concentrated on the NQF implementation, but much broader – on the integration of the entire qualifications system. The introduction of a national qualifications framework in Poland, which includes all types of education, came to be treated as an action that would conclude the series of reforms in the formal education system and provide a new impetus for changes in non-formal education, allowing for the greater integration of the qualifications system and a better response to lifelong learning challenges that Poland was and is still facing (Szczycka, Turek, Worek (2012); Worek, Stec, et. al. (2011); Debowski, Lis, Pogorzelski 2010). Zintegrowany System Kwalifikacji oparty na overarching NQF came to be perceived as one of the most important lifelong learning policy tools in Poland.

The IQS was developed in a participatory manner, following a number of debates with various stakeholders initiated and led by IBE (Chłoń-Domińczak, et al., 2014). Additionally, stakeholders were included in the conceptual work on developing the main elements of the system. The debate meetings provided the opportunity for social partners to actively participate in the development of a modernised qualifications system. This was important when the proposed Act on the IQS went through the legislative process, as the acceptance of social partners provided strong support to the newly elected government to adopt the Act in its first months of governance.

The Act on the Integrated Qualifications System establishing the Polish Qualifications Framework was passed in December 2015. Following the adoption of the Act, extensive activities were launched to ensure that the Integrated Qualification System could start functioning. The implementation of these activities has been supported from the European Social Fund, in particular within the framework of the systemic projects conducted by IBE. The description of activities related to the implementation of the IQS legal act was presented in chapter 8 of this report.

2 The Integrated Qualifications System – basic premises

2.1 Aims of the IQS

The aim of the Integrated Qualifications System based on the Polish Qualifications Framework is to raise the level of human capital in Poland (by increasing the number of learners and the effectiveness of investments in human capital) and to improve the ability to match supply and demand in the labour market, particularly with regard to qualifications awarded outside the formal general, vocational and higher education systems.

The solutions and mechanisms presented in the IQS Act serve to more effectively implement lifelong learning policies, which correspond to the needs of a modern knowledge-based economy. The IQS also increases the accessibility of qualifications offered in Poland and improves their quality, as well as enabling them to be compared to each other and referenced to the European Qualifications Framework, as the result of being assigned a level in the Polish Qualifications Framework.

Currently, two autonomous but internally consistent education systems function in the Polish legal framework governing qualifications – the formal general and vocational education system (system oświaty) and the higher education system. The development and awarding of qualifications for both these systems are governed by legal regulations, which comply with European standards.

Awarding qualifications outside the formal general, vocational and higher education systems is characterized by a great variety of regulatory approaches (legal and organisational) and varying degrees of required legal norms related to the particular fields in which these qualifications operate. What is lacking are basic common standards guaranteeing the credibility of qualifications – from standards of their definition and naming, to validation and certification principles, as well as quality assurance procedures for awarding qualifications. Also striking is the lack of a connection between qualifications awarded in various fields and qualifications systems.

The way the “qualifications market” currently operates in Poland affects attitudes towards lifelong learning. As a result, Poland, compared to other European Union countries, has a low level of competences among adults, as well as relatively low investments in human capital (increasing and supplementing competences after the completion of formal education) made by both adult Poles and the companies employing them.

The essence of the IQS Act is the introduction of a set of simple and consistent systemic solutions for qualifications awarded outside the formal general, vocational and higher education systems and the greater integration of all areas within which qualifications are awarded (formal general, vocational and higher education, regulated qualifications and market qualifications).

The IQS Act has introduced a new order in the area of awarding qualifications. The Act defines the roles and responsibilities of different entities operating in the area of qualifications and the

relationships among them. It introduces uniform terminology and common rules for awarding and ensuring the quality of qualifications attained outside the formal general, vocational and higher education systems (analogous solutions were introduced to these systems earlier).

Qualifications not included in the IQS can continue to function in Poland, but they are not assigned a PQF level and will not be able to be entered into the Integrated Qualifications Register.

The key solutions adopted in the Act on the IQS are as follows:

- All qualifications awarded in the formal general, vocational and higher education systems (after having completed first and second cycle studies and the doctorate degree) are included by law in the IQS.
- Other qualifications awarded in higher education (e.g. after completing post-graduate studies) and qualifications awarded outside the general, vocational and higher education systems also may be included in the IQS.
- Qualifications awarded outside the general, vocational and higher education systems are included in the IQS by ministers responsible for the qualification (relevant minister).
- All qualifications in the IQS will be entered in the Integrated Qualifications Register.
- Each qualification in the IQS must be described in the manner specified in the regulations and be assigned a PQF (Polish Qualifications Framework) level.
- Qualifications defined in the Act as a full qualification have their PQF level assigned by law.
- The remaining qualifications are assigned a PQF level as the result of comparing the required learning outcomes for the given qualification with the level descriptors of the Polish Qualifications Framework.
- A qualification in the IQS is awarded on the basis of achieving a positive result during the process of verifying that a person attaining the qualification has mastered its required learning outcomes (validation).
- Qualifications in the IQS can only be awarded by institutions authorized in legal regulations or by the relevant minister responsible for the qualification (certification).
- Each institution awarding qualifications included in the IQS is required to comply with internal and external quality assurance provisions that are consistent with the relevant regulations of the law.
- The relevant ministers of given qualifications are responsible for overseeing the awarding of qualifications and quality assurance.

The functioning of the integrated system is coordinated by the Minister Coordinator of the IQS with the support of the IQS Stakeholders Council.

2.2 Main elements of the integrated qualifications system

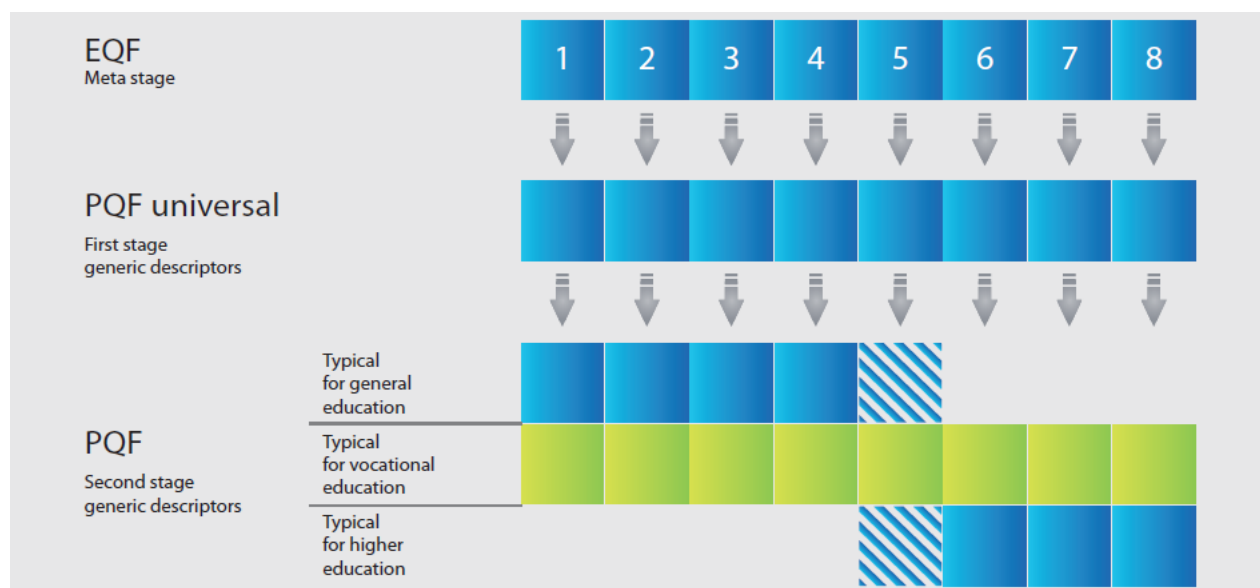
2.2.1 Polish Qualifications Framework

The Polish Qualifications Framework (PQF), like the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), consists of eight qualification levels. Each PQF level is described with the use of descriptors. The descriptors in the PQF capture the full spectrum of learning outcomes. They reflect progress from the lowest to the highest level achieved by the learner. The PQF descriptors show how the following abilities advance at successive levels through learning in different contexts and stages of life:

- knowledge (depth, scope),
- skills (problem-solving, the innovative application of knowledge in practice, learning and communication),
- social competence (readiness to work with others and to assume responsibility for assigned tasks).

A unique Polish solution is to distinguish two stages of generic descriptors in the PQF. Second stage generic descriptors further detail the first stage generic descriptors, which have a universal character (they relate to all sectors of education). Universal descriptors and second stage generic descriptors should be read together. Figure 1 illustrates the structure of the Polish Qualifications Framework.

Figure 1. Structure of the Polish Qualifications Framework



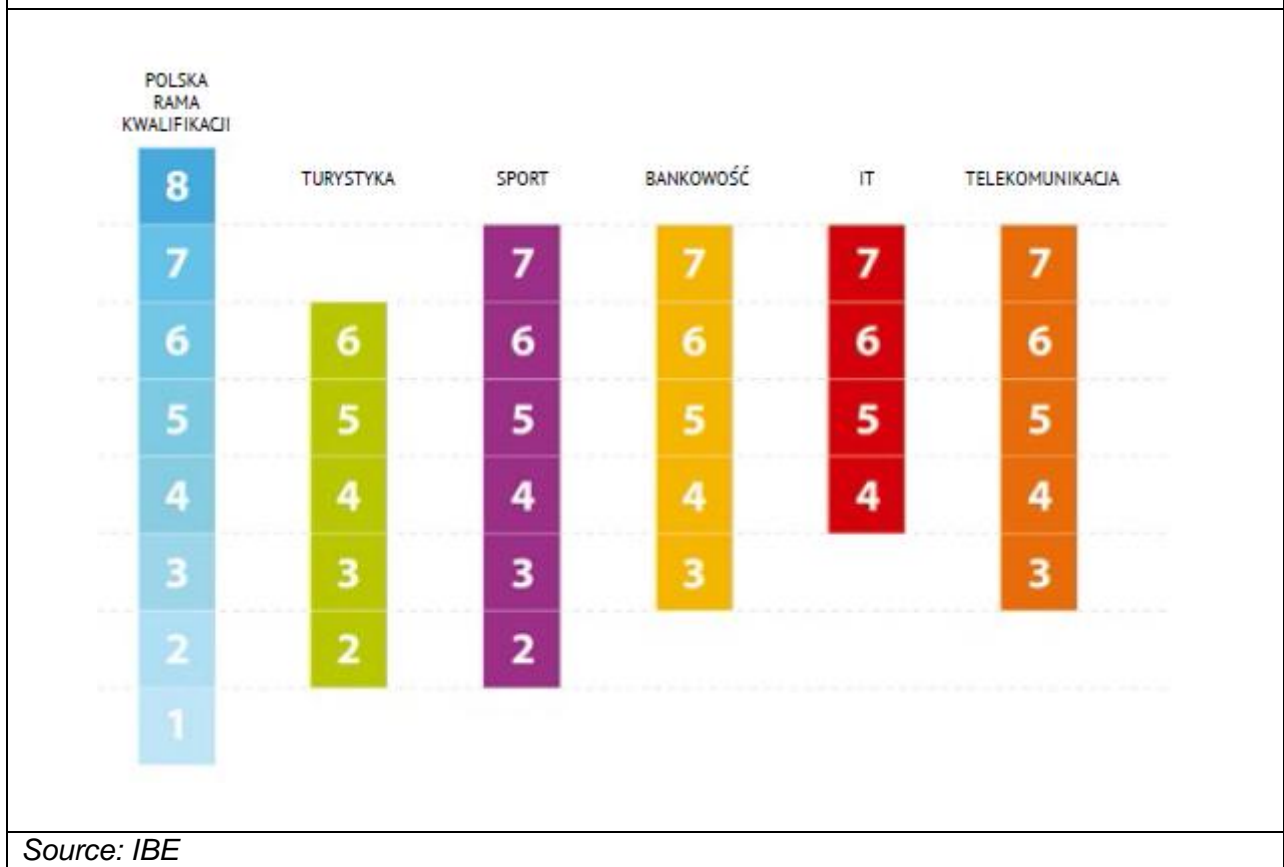
Source: IBE

The Polish qualifications system can also have third stage generic descriptors. These descriptors already function in areas of learning in higher education and they will also be used to describe specific fields of activities (sectors) – known as “sectoral qualifications frameworks”.

The purpose of the sectoral qualifications frameworks (SQFs), which are able to be referenced to the PQF, is to organise the qualifications and competences of a given industry, thus enabling a better understanding and comparability of its qualifications and creating better conditions for occupational mobility, both locally and internationally. They also provide both employers and employees with an intentional and individualized approach towards career development (Trawińska-Konador et al., 2015).

Developing sectoral qualifications frameworks is the domain of interested sectors, but the decision of relevant ministers determines the inclusion of these frameworks in the IQS. Including a SQF in the IQS is voluntary. A decision to include a SQF in the IQS can be made after it has referenced its descriptors to those of the Polish Qualifications Framework.

Figure 2. Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks



2.2.2 Integrated Qualifications Register

The IQS Act establishes the Integrated Qualifications Register (IQR). The IQR is a public register functioning in an Internet portal at the following website: <http://rejestr.kwalifikacje.gov.pl/>.

The register encompasses all qualifications included in the IQS – those awarded in the formal general, vocational and higher education systems, regulated qualifications and market qualifications.

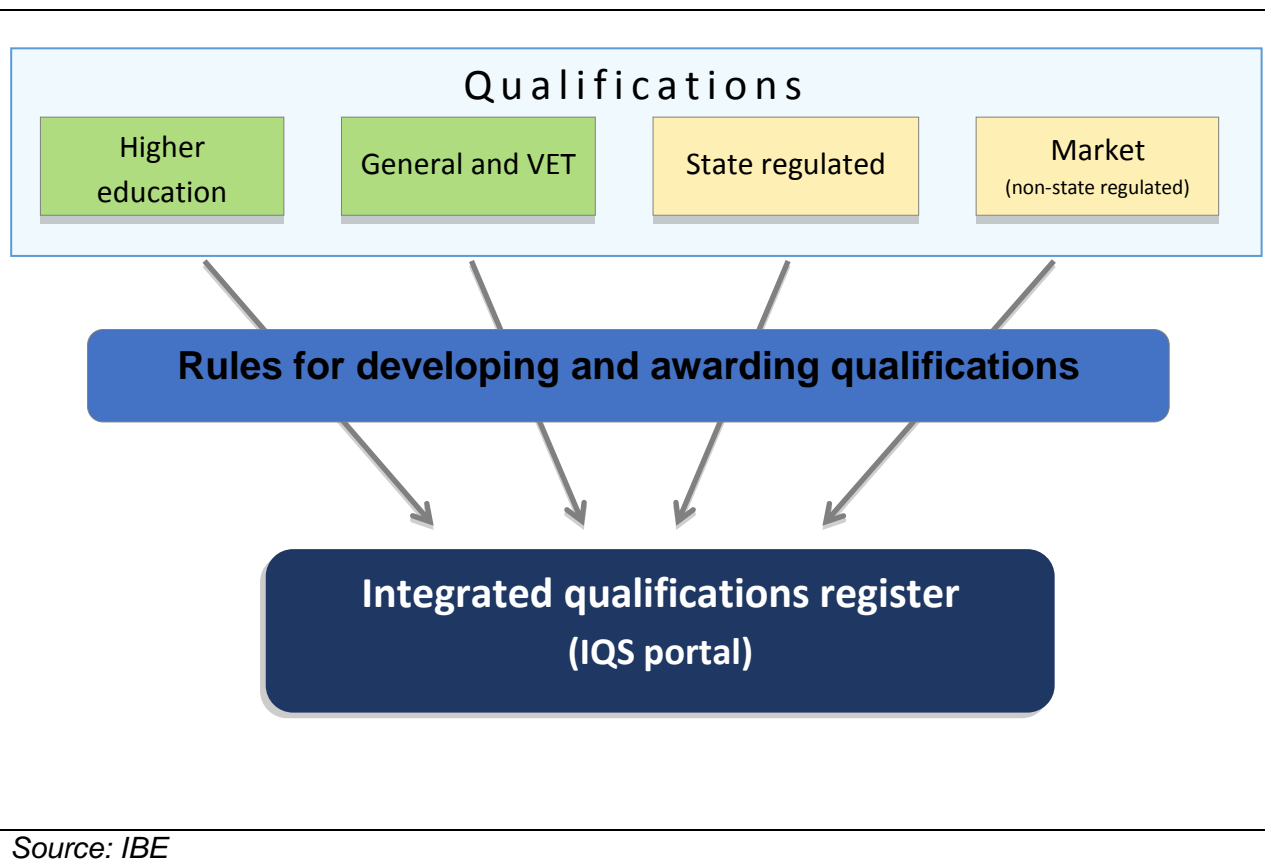
Qualifications included in the IQS are entered in the IQR regardless of whether they appear in other registers (catalogues, lists) maintained by individual ministries, industries, communities and institutions.

The presence of a qualification in the Register means that its credibility has been confirmed by public authorities and that it has a defined PQF level.

Qualifications that are not included in the IQS cannot be entered in the Register.

The data collected in the IQR about qualifications are publicly available from the IQS portal. The Act defines the methodology of obtaining the information listed in the IQR. Information on the listed qualifications will be regularly updated.

Figure 3. Integrated Qualifications Registry



Source: IBE

2.2.3 Standards of describing a qualification

The IQS Act does not change the standards for describing qualifications awarded within the formal general, vocational and higher education systems. The provisions of the Act on the standards of describing a qualification only apply to qualifications originating outside of these systems. The provisions define the requirements for the scope and manner of presenting information about regulated and market qualifications in the application for including a qualification in the IQS and Integrated Qualifications Register.

In preparing the requirements for describing a qualification (in the IQS), it was assumed that information will be included on the qualification that is important from the point of view of those wishing to attain it, the validating and certifying institutions, as well as the government authorities responsible for policy development.

The most important part of the description is the presentation of the learning outcomes required for the qualification. According to the description requirements, learning outcomes are to be defined in several, complementary ways that include:

- 1) A synthesis describing the learning outcomes – a concise description of the types of activities a person with the qualification is prepared to do,
- 2) Sets of required learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and social competence),
- 3) Descriptions of the individual learning outcomes comprising the sets and their verification criteria, which precisely state the scope of the required skills and define the knowledge and social competences related to these skills that a person should have.

The description of the learning outcomes is supplemented by the requirements for validation (examination). Validation requirements play a key role in ensuring the quality and comparability of qualifications awarded by various institutions. All components of the description of learning outcomes required for a qualification constitute an entirety – they are complementary and only read together, will they properly present the specific character of the qualification.

2.2.4 Validation and certification

A basic premise of the IQS is that only institutions granted certification authority will be able to certify qualifications in the integrated system.

Authorization to certify qualifications arises directly from the law or is granted by the relevant minister pursuant to the provisions of the IQS Act. A qualification can only be awarded on the basis of a positive result of the validation of its required learning outcomes.

According to the provisions specified in the Act, the description of each regulated and market qualification must present the validation requirements, which are applicable to all institutions awarding this qualification. This ensures that the validation process conducted by different institutions can be compared.

2.2.5 Quality assurance of qualifications

The IQS Act does not change the quality assurance mechanisms applied in the formal general, vocational and higher education systems. These systems have had quality assurance solutions functioning in accordance with European standards and the provisions of the IQS Act for many years.

According to the IQS Act, the validation and certification processes of each certifying institution operating outside formal education systems must be internally and externally quality assured.

The certifying institution must develop an internal quality assurance system in accordance with the provisions of the Act. The internal quality assurance system assesses the rules of conduct, procedures, methods and organisational solutions. The purpose of the internal quality assurance system in the certifying institution is to ensure that validation and certification are carried out properly and improved.

The IQS Act defines external quality assurance as monitoring and the periodic evaluation of activities related to awarding qualifications, carried out by an entity that is external to the certifying institution. The external quality assurance institution strengthens the supervision of compliance with the standards of awarding qualifications and assists certifying institutions in improving validation and certification processes.

The provisions of the IQS Act require the IQS minister coordinator to develop and maintain a list of entities authorized to carry out external quality assurance activities.

For more about quality assurance, see Chapter 6.

3 Institutional setting

3.1. National authorities and IQS Stakeholders Council

The institutional framework of the integrated qualifications system ensues from the IQS Act.

According to the Act, the Integrated Qualifications System in Poland is coordinated by **the minister coordinator**, who is the Minister of National Education. The minister:

- leads the Inter-ministerial Taskforce for Lifelong Learning,
- coordinates the activities of other ministries and leads activities on the development of the IQS,
- monitors the functioning of the IQS, prepares reports on qualifications at the request of the Council of Ministers,
- manages the IQS portal that links to the Integrated Qualifications Register,
- cooperates with the IQS Stakeholders Council and provides organisational support.

Stakeholders are represented by the **IQS Stakeholders Council**. The Council plays an advisory and supportive role to the minister coordinator of the IQS. According to the IQS Act, the Council:

- supports the minister coordinator of the IQS to ensure the consistency of the qualifications system,
- monitors the functioning of the IQS, as well as analyses and exchanges experiences among groups of stakeholders,
- provides opinions on proposals of new legal acts on issues related to the IQS,
- provides opinions on the recommendations prepared by teams of experts regarding the assignment of a qualification's level,
- provides opinions on sectoral qualifications frameworks before their inclusion in the IQS.

The IQS Stakeholders Council consists of representatives from: the National Chamber of Commerce, employers' organisations and trade unions, the Conference of Rectors of Academic Schools in Poland, the Conference of Rectors of Vocational Schools Poland, the Central Examination Board, entities operating in the field of non-formal education, local governments and the minister coordinator of the Integrated Qualifications System. The IQS Act provides detailed rules for appointing members of the Council, the duration of their term of office, selecting the chairperson of the Council and the way it operates.

All **relevant ministers** decide on the inclusion of qualifications and sectoral qualifications frameworks appropriate to their ministry. For example, the decision on including the qualification of wine maker in the IQS is made by the Minister of Agriculture, while the qualification of fitness

trainer is included by the Minister of Sports and Tourism. The ministers also perform periodic reviews of qualifications that they are responsible for. The relevant minister also:

- authorizes awarding bodies to award qualifications,
- supervises the processes of awarding qualifications and the quality assurance of these processes.

The IQS Act requires ministers to review regulated qualifications in order to determine which of them should be included in the IQS. A transitional period is provided to allow regulated qualifications that existed prior to the Act to be quickly included in the IQS.

The Act does not limit the existing scope of the competence of ministers on matters relating to qualifications. In order to reduce the number of new tasks related to qualifications now required of ministers, other institutions may be authorized to implement them.

The Integrated Qualifications Register (IQR) has been managed by the Polish Agency of Enterprise Development (PARP), however since January 2018 this task will be given to the Educational Research Institute (IBE). All qualifications included in the IQS will be entered in the register. Information on these qualifications are publicly available through the IQR portal, which began operating in mid-July 2016. The responsibilities of the institution which manages IQR include:

- registering qualifications and updating information on qualifications, awarding bodies and external quality assurance institutions,
- assessing the formal aspects of all types of requests made to the relevant ministers,
- collecting information on developments in the Integrated Qualifications System (statistical reports on awarded qualifications, evaluation reports, etc., contributes to labour market intelligence),
- informing awarding bodies about modifications made to qualifications,
- administering the part of the IQS portal related to the Integrated Qualifications Register.

The IQR plays an important role in the integration of the qualifications system in Poland, as it contains the different types of qualifications included in the IQS.

3.2. Awarding bodies

The awarding bodies functioning on the basis of the School Education Act (*system oświaty*) and higher education acts are included in the IQS by law. However, the qualifications of these education sectors are not covered by the provisions of the IQS Act for validation, certification, quality assurance principles of awarding qualifications or the principles of supervising the awarding of qualifications. It is assumed that the formal education system in Poland fully complies with IQS requirements and no changes are needed here.

A relevant minister can include regulated qualifications that fall within the relevant sectors administered by his/her ministry in the IQS according to the rules and procedures described in the Act. The relevant minister is also responsible for appointing awarding bodies and external quality assurance institutions for regulated qualifications.

In the case of market qualifications (non-state regulated), institutions wanting to become awarding bodies apply for such authorization to the relevant ministers. Upon a successful assessment of their capacity to meet the criteria to award qualifications (among others, on their organisational conditions and personnel capacity to conduct validation, and eventually other conditions pertaining to a given qualification), the relevant minister includes the institution as an awarding body in the Integrated Qualifications System. Ministers may also rescind authorization to certify or remove an entity from the list of awarding bodies in certain situations defined by the Act.

Certifying institutions may authorize other entities to conduct validation if they fulfil the requirements. Authorizing another entity to conduct validation, however, does not release the certifying institution from the responsibility of ensuring that validation is properly carried out.

Institutions pay a fee to apply for the authorization to certify qualifications, as well as when the application has been accepted and qualifications are awarded – the fee for functioning in the system (proportional to the income from fees paid from persons to have qualifications awarded).

3.3. Institutions responsible for quality assurance

The IQS Act also defines the principles of quality assurance.

In the case of qualifications awarded in the formal education system (general, VET, HE), the quality assurance of qualifications is ensured by relevant existing institutions functioning according to European standards and recommendations.

In the case of market and regulated qualifications, all awarding bodies (certifying institutions) must have a system of internal quality assurance and also be included in an external quality assurance system. External quality assurance is provided by an external quality assurance institution (EQAI) selected by the relevant minister from a list of external quality assurance institutions administered by the minister coordinator (see Chapter 7 on the quality assurance of qualifications).

4 Types and legal status of qualifications included in the NQF

Any qualification awarded in the national qualifications system in Poland can be included in the integrated qualifications system (IQS) if it complies with the relevant provisions regarding:

- the description of qualifications,
- quality assurance (external and internal),
- quality of validation/examination,
- quality of the levelling process.

Some qualifications are included in the IQS by law; others will have to follow an application procedure (see more in Chapter 5). Including qualification in the IQS is not obligatory, and qualifications not included in the integrated system can still function in Poland. However, such qualifications are not assigned a PQF level and cannot be entered into the Register.

Two criteria distinguish different types of qualifications in the IQS, although they are not stated explicitly in the legislation. The first criterion is whether the qualification is related to a level of formal education or not. The second criterion is the legal basis that governs the process of awarding the qualification.

The IQS Act states that full qualifications are those awarded in the formal general and vocational education system (*system oświaty*) after completing stages of education and the first, second and third cycle qualifications as defined in the Act on Higher Education.

Partial qualifications are those that are included in the IQS and are not full qualifications.

A reason for distinguishing full and partial qualifications was to have the IQS differentiate between qualifications confirming learning outcomes attained in a multi-year cycle of education related to the level of education, and qualifications confirming the attainment of smaller sets of learning outcomes.

Full qualifications are related to the level of education and the traditional path of attaining qualifications in the formal education system. Another reason for the division between full and partial was the fear that the distinction between formal education system qualifications and the remaining ones would become blurred. It was feared, among other things, that students would abandon the acquisition of skills in the formal education system in favour of smaller, specialized qualifications that have been assigned high PQF levels.

While designing the systemic solutions in Poland and preparing the Referencing Report, discussions took place on whether Poland's systemic solutions would allow partial vocational qualifications awarded outside the formal higher education system to be assigned to levels above 4 and 5. Initially, the Ministry of Science and Higher Education was against this. The argument of having a clear distinction between full and partial qualifications helped soften the

position of the Ministry. Full and partial qualifications also have different graphic emblems for the level of the qualification on certificates and diplomas.

It should be added that the term “partial qualification” used in Polish documents, including the Referencing Report, does not fully reflect the concept behind this term in Polish. *Kwalifikacja cząstkowa* in the Polish language means that this is a smaller qualification and not necessarily a part of something larger (although it could be a part of a “larger” qualification). In this sense, the term *minor qualification* seems to better reflect the meaning of *kwalifikacja cząstkowa*.

The second criterion of distinguishing categories of qualifications is the legal basis governing their awarding process:

- qualifications³ awarded in the formal general and vocational system (*system oświaty*) – the awarding process of these qualifications is governed by the School Education Act,⁴
- qualifications awarded in the higher education system – the awarding process of these qualifications is governed by the Act on higher education,
- state regulated qualifications – qualifications regulated by legal acts but not awarded in the formal education (school) system,⁵
- market qualifications – qualifications not regulated by legal acts, which are awarded on the basis of the principle of economic freedom.

The scheme of the types of qualifications found in the IQS is presented in the following table:

³ This type of qualification is not explicitly defined in the IQS Act.

⁴ The School Education Act of 7 September 1991 (Journal of Laws 2004 No. 256 item 2572, with later amendments).

⁵ Defined in the IQS Act.

Table 1. Types of qualifications in Poland's Integrated Qualifications System

Note: awarding bodies are named in the brackets

	Qualifications awarded within the formal general and VET systems	Qualifications awarded within HE	Regulated qualifications	Market qualifications (non-state regulated qualifications)
Full qualifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Certificate of completing primary school [<i>school</i>] – Certificate of completing lower secondary school [<i>school</i>] – Matura certificate [<i>regional examination boards</i>] – Vocational Diploma [<i>regional examination boards</i>] – journeyman certificate (for occupations listed in the classification of vocational school occupations administered by the Ministry of National Education) [<i>boards of craft chambers</i>] 	<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – diploma certifying the title of <i>licencjat</i> – diploma certifying the title of <i>inżynier</i> – diploma certifying the title of <i>magister</i> – diploma certifying the title of <i>magister inżynier</i> [<i>HE institutions</i>] 	N/A	N/A

<p>Partial qualifications</p>	<p>– vocational certificate <i>[regional examination board]</i></p>	<p>Examples: – certificates of completion of non-degree post-graduate studies <i>[HE institutions]</i></p>	<p>Examples: – Diver – class one/two/three <i>[Divers' Qualifying Commission of the Director of the Maritime Office in Gdynia]</i> – Tax advisor <i>[National Examination Board on Tax Counselling after having given the examination for becoming a tax advisor]</i></p>	<p>Examples: – Certificate of Risk Management of the Warsaw Institute of Banking <i>[Warsaw Institute of Banking]</i> – ECDL Certificates <i>[ECDL Poland]</i></p>
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Source: proposed by the authors

Depending on the type of qualification, there are different procedures for their inclusion in the IQS:

- full and partial qualifications awarded within the formal general and vocational education (*system oświaty*) and full qualifications awarded in HE are included automatically in the IQS,
- partial qualifications in HE (non-degree post-graduate studies) are included in the IQS by the decision of higher education institutions, scientific institutions of the Polish Academy of Sciences or research institutions authorized to provide post-graduate studies,
- regulated qualifications, which are always partial, are included in the IQS by the decision of the relevant minister,
- market qualifications, which are also always partial, are included in the IQF based on approval of an application submitted by the interested institution by the relevant minister.

It should be noted that market qualifications can be awarded by institutions that also award full and partial qualifications in the formal education system as well as regulated qualifications. For example, a university or VET school could decide to develop a short training programme (responding to employers' or social needs) concluding with a qualification, but the training and awarding process for this qualifications are not part of any study or school programme regulated by a legal act.

The Polish Act on the IQS also defines the following types of qualifications based on their status in the IQS. Distinguishing these qualifications is technical in nature.

- qualifications included in the IQS – a market or regulated qualification is deemed to be included in the IQS as of the date notification is published of its inclusion in the Official Journal of the Republic of Poland, the "Polish Monitor". A qualification which is included may not necessarily be awarded, because the awarding body has not been chosen yet (see more in Chapter 6).
- qualification functioning in the IQS – a market or regulated qualification is deemed as functioning in the IQS from the date an agreement has been signed between the awarding body (certifying institution) and an external quality assurance institution (see more in Chapter 6).
- archival qualification – as the result of a review by the relevant minister, a given qualification may be deemed an archival qualification if it meets the conditions set out in the IQS Act. Notification of this is made through an announcement in the Polish Monitor.
- suspended qualification – if the authority of all certifying bodies has expired for a given qualification, the relevant minister announces in the Polish Monitor that the qualification has the status of a suspended qualification.

Legal status of qualifications included in the NQF

The IQS Act does not specify the requirements for the formal general, vocational and higher education systems on validation, certification, qualifications' quality assurance or the supervision of the process of awarding qualifications. Formal general and vocational education qualifications are established by the Minister of National Education, who determines the regulations governing all aspects related to them. The qualifications (study programmes) offered in higher education are developed by higher education institutions, which own these programmes.

In the case of regulated qualifications, the relevant minister is formally responsible for defining the qualification and certification system. The relevant minister designates the awarding body(ies) for the qualification.

Because relevant ministers determine the principles of awarding qualifications in the formal general, vocational and higher education systems as well as regulated qualifications, they "monopolize" these qualifications as their sole owners.

A specific feature of the Polish system is that in the case of market qualifications, certifying institutions can be appointed for those qualifications already existing in the Integrated Qualifications Register. Once a market qualification is entered in the Register, it becomes a public good. The institutions applying to have the qualification entered in the IQR cannot reserve the exclusive right to award it. Any institution interested in awarding a qualification that already exists in the Register and is awarded by other entities may apply for the authority to certify it and be included in the list of certifying institutions (see Box 2).

This solution is designed to protect the market of the Polish qualifications system from becoming excessively monopolized.

Box 2. Granting the authority to certify market qualifications

Let's use a hypothetical example: the association of confectioners in Warsaw introduces a qualification to the IQS called "making jelly doughnuts". The qualification is entered in the IQR and the Warsaw confectioners association receives the status of certifying institution. A year later, the Kraków association of confectioners wants to find out if it too can offer the "making jelly doughnuts" qualification in the IQS. The answer is yes. Under the Act on the IQS, the Kraków confectioners association can apply to the relevant minister to become a certifying institution for the qualification of "making jelly doughnuts". The minister makes the decision, and in doing so, does not need to obtain the consent of the Warsaw confectioners association, which originally applied to have this qualification entered in the IQS. The Kraków confectioners association can achieve the status of certifying institution as long as it meets the requirements specified in the IQS Act.

5 Procedures of the inclusion of qualifications in the NQF

As indicated in Chapter 4, there are different procedures for including qualifications in the NQF depending on its type.

Formal general and VET qualifications are developed by the Ministry of National Education and when the relevant core curricula are accepted and entered into the law (by the issuance of regulations), they are automatically included in the IQS at the moment of their creation. The Minister of National Education is responsible for the process of assigning a PQF level to these qualifications by comparing their learning outcomes with PQF level descriptors.

Full higher education qualifications (*licencjat/inżynier, magister, doktor*) are assigned to a PQF level by the IQS law. When higher education institutions develop study programmes, they must reference them to the level descriptors of the Polish Qualifications Framework (to the second stage level descriptors). The appropriateness of the study programme's level and its compliance with the PQF level descriptors is verified by the Polish Accreditation Committee.

The relevant minister may include regulated qualifications within those fields which are related to the scope of the ministry's responsibilities (sectors) in the IQS based on the regulations and procedures described in the IQS Act. Market qualifications are included in the IQS by the relevant minister based on a request submitted by an interested institution (private training provider, business chamber, branch organisation, etc.).

The procedures of including regulated and market qualifications are similar. In this chapter, both of these procedures are described in detail.

5.1. Market qualifications

5.1.1 Procedure of including market qualifications

Non-regulated (market) qualifications can be included in the IQS at the request of entities conducting organised activities in areas of the economy, labour market, education or training. For example, such an entity could be: a private company, an organisation of construction industry entrepreneurs, an association of shoe manufacturers, an association of training companies, etc. The intention of broadly defining the entities that can apply for having a qualification included in the IQS is to ensure that the system is open to different qualifications and groups of stakeholders.

An interested entity submits an electronic application to the relevant minister responsible for the qualifications of a given field to the entity operating the Integrated Qualifications Registry – currently it is PARP, but since 2018 it will be IBE. PARP assesses the formal aspects of the application – this process cannot take longer than 14 days. PARP then electronically transmits a

correctly completed application to the relevant minister. The minister should review the application within four months.

Upon receiving the application, the relevant minister takes the following steps, which are described in the IQS Act:

Step 1. Conduct consultations

The minister shall consult the proposed market qualification with relevant stakeholders. The consultations should inform relevant stakeholders about starting the procedure of including a qualification in the IQS and obtain opinions on this. The minister sends information about the qualification to relevant stakeholders, places information on the IQS portal about the start of the consultation process and the opportunity to submit opinions. Then, the minister responds to the suggestions submitted and prepares a summary of the results of the consultations. This is sent to the applicant (submitting body) and simultaneously published in the IQS portal.

Step 2. Obtain the opinions of specialists

After the consultations, the minister selects specialists and requests that they provide an opinion on the social and economic need for including the proposed qualification in the IQS. Before the opinion is prepared, the minister provides the specialists with the recommendations obtained from the stakeholders (a summary of the consultations). The specialists involved in this step:

- 1) have practical experience in the field of the market qualification,
- 2) represent various stakeholder groups to whom the market qualification is relevant,
- 3) have the competence to assess the individual learning outcomes of the proposed market qualification.

Step 3. Assess the application

After obtaining the opinion of the specialists, the minister shall assess the application for including the market qualification in the IQS and make a positive or negative decision. The following elements are taken into consideration:

- 1) the learning outcomes are assessed in relation to the tasks that a person with this particular qualification must carry out; the adequacy of the validation requirements for these learning outcomes is also assessed,
- 2) the purpose of including the market qualification in the IQS is assessed, primarily by taking into consideration:
 - a) the extent to which the proposed market qualification conforms to social needs, the needs of the labour market and employers' expectations,

- b) the adaptability of the qualification's requirements to objective circumstances and the ability to achieve the intended learning outcomes in a foreseeable amount of time,
- c) the similarity of the market qualification to qualifications already included in the integrated qualifications system.

If the relevant minister rejects the application, the applicant (submitting body) is informed of this decision and provided justification for the rejection (art. 23, para. 1). If the assessment results in a positive decision to have the qualification included in the IQS, the minister takes the steps described below.

Step 4. Assign a PQF level (levelling)

The relevant minister shall appoint a team of experts, which compares the learning outcomes required for the qualification to the Polish Qualifications Framework level descriptors. They then present their recommendation to the minister on assigning a specific PQF level to this qualification. In addition to the proposed PQF level, the recommendation also contains a description of the learning outcomes required for the qualification (in accordance with art. 9, para. 1, item 1 of the IQS Act), as well as a reference to the level of the respective sectoral qualifications framework, if such a framework has been included in the IQS.

The minister coordinator issues regulations on the conditions to be met by the experts, the process of their appointment and the procedure of comparing the learning outcomes required for a given qualification with PQF level descriptors, as well as the manner of documenting the course of this process (art. 21, para. 8).

If the recommendation is that a particular qualification should be assigned to PQF level 6, 7 or 8, the relevant minister may request the opinion of the Minister of Science and Higher Education (art. 21, para. 5) to confirm the validity of the result of the comparison made by the experts.

The minister sends the experts' recommendation to the IQS Stakeholders Council for their opinion. If the opinion is positive, the minister assigns the PQF level to the qualification according to the recommendation. Otherwise, a team of experts once more prepares a recommendation, which refers to the opinion of the Council, and then the minister assigns the PQF level to the qualification according to the new recommendation.

The recommendation prepared by the teams of experts on the PQF level is binding for the minister.

Step 5. Announce the inclusion of the market qualification in the Integrated Qualifications System

The announcement includes information on:

- 1) the name of the market qualification,
- 2) the type of document certifying that the market qualification has been awarded, the time period of its validity and (if needed) the conditions required to extend its validity,
- 3) the market qualification's assigned PQF level and its reference to the level in the Sectoral Qualifications Framework (SQF), if a relevant SQF has been established for the given sector or industry,
- 4) the learning outcomes described in accordance with the IQS Act (art. 9, para. 1, item 1),
- 5) the validation requirements and the entity carrying out validation,
- 6) if needed, additional requirements ensuing from the character of the given qualification, relating to:
 - a) the scope and frequency of the internal evaluation,
 - b) the scope and frequency of producing reports from the external quality assurance process,
 - c) the scope and frequency of reporting on activities,
- 7) if needed, additional conditions to be met by the institution applying for the authorization to carry out certification,
- 8) if needed, the conditions to be met by the person who will be undergoing validation, particularly including the required level of education,
- 9) the time period after which the qualification is reviewed.

The announcement is published in the Polish Monitor. The date of the announcement is the day that the market qualification is included in the IQS (art. 25, para. 3).

Note: a market qualification included in the IQS achieves the status of a qualification functioning in the IQS only when the relevant minister appoints the external quality assurance institution for at least one of the certifying institutions entitled to award this qualification.

Step 6. Send this information to the entity operating the Integrated Qualifications Register

The Minister informs PARP to include a given qualification in the IQS and provides it with information about the qualification (in accordance with the scope determined in art. 84, para. 1).

Step 7. Announce that institutions may now apply for the authorization to certify the qualification

The minister places an announcement in the IQS portal that institutions may now apply for the authorization to certify the qualification.

Step 8. Begin the procedure of authorizing entities to provide certification (art. 26)

In the case when an entity requesting the inclusion of a market qualification in the IQS also applies for the authorization to certify this qualification, the minister initiates both procedures simultaneously.

Note: The minister, specialists and team of experts work with the entity requesting the inclusion of a qualification in the IQS during consultations, preparing the opinion on the purpose of including the qualification in the IQS, assessing the application and assigning the PQF level (art. 22). The aim of this cooperation is to obtain necessary clarifications and to eventually modify the description of the qualification, if needed.

5.1.2 Granting the authority to certify market qualifications in the IQS

In the IQS, market qualifications can only be awarded by institutions that are authorized by the relevant minister to perform such certification. A request for the authorization to certify a market qualification may be submitted by an entity conducting business activities, if it satisfies the conditions set out in art. 41, para. 2 of the Act on the IQS (among others, ensuring the organisational conditions and capacity of personnel to conduct validation in accordance with the requirements specified in the announcement of including the qualification in the IQS, and any additional conditions presented in this announcement).

An interested entity submits an electronic application for certification authority to the relevant minister through PARP, which operates the Integrated Qualifications Register. PARP assesses the formal aspects of the application and submits it electronically to the minister.

If the application does not meet the formal requirements, the minister concludes the process according to the provisions of the Code of Administrative Procedure. An application meeting the formal requirements is reviewed, and if the information contained does not raise any questions, the minister issues an administrative decision authorizing the entity to certify the market qualification indicated in the application (art. 41, para. 1).

If the administrative decision to grant certification authority is final, the minister chooses an entity from the list of external quality assurance institutions (EQAI) and under an agreement, entrusts that entity to carry out external quality assurance activities with the certifying institution of the given qualification (art. 59, para. 1). The awarding body may begin to certify the market qualification as of the date the contract with the EQAI is concluded (art. 62).

When choosing an entity from the EQAI list, the minister takes into account:

- 1) the provision of the IQS Act stating there can be no more than five external quality assurance institutions for one market qualification,
- 2) the economic rationale and effectiveness of the use of existing resources,
- 3) the principle of the balanced distribution of tasks among the entities included in the EQAI list (art. 59, para. 3).

Bearing in mind the efficiency of the procedure for issuing a decision on certification authority, the minister may appoint other entities to perform this function, such as: a state body, the director of a subordinate organisational unit or one under the minister's supervision, or an entity of a professional self-governed organisation or business organisation. This authorization is granted by issuing a regulation. In cases where decisions on granting certification authority are made by an entity appointed by the minister, an appeal of a decision is considered in the first instance by the minister (art. 45, para. 1).

5.1.3 Reviewing market qualifications

One of the aims of establishing the IQS was to ensure that the qualifications functioning in the market are up-to-date. Therefore, market qualifications in the IQS are subject to mandatory reviews. The relevant minister is responsible for carrying out periodic reviews of qualifications under his/her jurisdiction by the dates specified in the announcement of their inclusion to the IQS. In cases justified by social or economic needs, the minister can perform such a review at an earlier date or under special circumstances.

The minister carries out the review according to the relevant provisions on the inclusion of a market qualification in the IQS (art. 19):

- 1) consultations on the qualification are carried out with stakeholder groups,
- 2) expert opinions and recommendations are obtained on extending the functioning of the given market qualification in the IQS, modifying the qualification, or discontinuing its awarding due to the lack of a justification for its functioning (art. 27, para. 2).

As a result of the obtained opinions, the minister may:

- 1) acknowledge that the qualification will continue to function unchanged in the IQS,
- 2) make an appropriate modification to the qualification, or
- 3) change its status to that of an archival qualification.

5.1.4 Modifying a qualification

A modification to a market qualification cannot change its name or assigned PQF level. A modification (update) of the learning outcomes required for the qualification can be made only to the extent that this does not result in the need to change its name or PQF level. If greater modifications are necessary, then a new qualification should be developed and go through the process of being included in the IQS.

The minister informs the public of modifications to a qualification in an announcement published in the Polish Monitor.

5.1.5 Changing the status of a qualification to an archival qualification

A qualification becomes an archival qualification by the decision of the minister when it meets the following conditions:

- 1) during the three years preceding the review, not a single document has been issued confirming that the qualification was awarded, or
- 2) continued awarding of the qualification is not justified due to social and/or economic reasons.

Termination of authorizations and contracts related to the qualification being archived occurs on the date it has been announced by the relevant minister that it is now an archival qualification. This announcement is published in the Polish Monitor.

Archiving a qualification does not invalidate previously issued documents certifying its attainment. Persons who are in the process of validating such a qualification on the day the change of status is announced will be able to attain the archival qualification as long as the validation result is positive.

5.1.6 Returning an archival qualification to the status of a qualification functioning in the IQS

An interested entity may request the minister to restore an archival qualification to its status as functioning. The interested entity initiates this process by submitting an electronic application to the relevant minister through PARP. PARP assesses the formal aspects of the application and then submits it electronically to the minister.

The minister has four months to consider the application. He/she first obtains the opinions of experts on the sense of having the qualification function again in the IQS. These opinions are illustrative subjective and not binding. Then the minister considers the application.

If the decision is positive, the minister informs the public by an announcement that the archival qualification is being restored to a functioning one in the IQS. This announcement is published in the Polish Monitor. At the same time, notification is placed in the IQS portal that applications can be submitted for the authorization to certify this qualification.

If the decision is negative, the relevant minister informs the applicant entity of this decision and the reasons for it.⁶

⁶ There is no appeal to the administrative court if a negative decision has been issued.

5.2. Regulated qualifications

5.2.1 Inclusion of regulated qualifications in the IQS

As stated in Chapter 3, the relevant minister can include regulated qualifications within the scope of the ministry's responsibilities in the IQS based on the rules and procedures described in the IQS Act.

A qualification can be included in the IQS that has described, among others:

- learning outcomes described in accordance with the IQS Act,
- validation requirements,
- institutions authorized to certify it,
- if necessary, additional conditions to be met by institutions applying for certification authority,
- institutions entrusted with responsibility for external quality assurance,
- the term of validity of the document confirming attainment of the qualification and (if necessary) the conditions for the renewal of this document.

Each regulated qualification to be included in the IQS must comply with the requirements enumerated above.

Step 1. Assigning a PQF level

The relevant minister appoints a team of experts, which compares the learning outcomes required for the qualification with the PQF level descriptors and presents a recommendation on a specific PQF level for this qualification.

The conditions to be met by the experts, how they are appointed and the procedure for comparing the qualification's required learning outcomes with PQF level descriptors, as well as the manner of documenting the work of assigning a level, is determined by the minister coordinator, who issues a regulation defining these issues (art. 21, para. 8).

If the experts recommends a PQF level of 6, 7 or 8 for the qualification, the relevant minister may request the opinion of the Minister of Science and Higher Education (art. 21, para. 5) to confirm the validity of the result of the comparison made by the experts.

The minister sends the recommendation of the experts to the IQS Stakeholders Council for their opinion. If its opinion is positive, the minister assigns the PQF level to the qualification according to the recommendation. Otherwise, a team of experts once more prepares a recommendation, which refers to the opinion of the Council, and then the minister assigns the PQF level to the qualification according to the new recommendation.

Step 2. Announce the inclusion of the regulated qualification in the IQS

The minister informs the public in an announcement published in the Polish Monitor that the regulated qualification has been assigned a PQF level and that it is included in the IQS. The date the announcement is published is the date the qualification is considered to be included in the IQS.

Step 3. Providing information to the entity operating the IQR

The Minister informs PARP that the qualification has been included in the IQS and provides it with information about this qualification. If granting the authority to certify this qualification is made by administrative decision, then the relevant minister places an announcement in the IQS portal that interested entities may apply for such authorization.

Granting the authority to certify regulated qualifications included in the IQS

Certifying institutions (CI) are granted certification authority for a given qualification when the relevant minister issues separate regulations or an administrative decision about this issue.

When an administrative decision is used to designate the certifying institution for a given qualification, an entity operating a business can apply if it meets the conditions specified in the IQS Act (among others, ensuring the organisational conditions and personnel to conduct validation in compliance with the requirements defined in the announcement of the qualification's inclusion in the IQS, as well as fulfilling any other conditions listed in the announcement).

To become a certifying institution, an interested institution submits an electronic application to the relevant minister through PARP. PARP assesses compliance with the formal requirements of the application and if there are no formal problems, submits it electronically to the minister.

If the application does not meet the formal requirements, the minister concludes the proceedings according to the provisions of the Code of Administrative Procedure. An application fulfilling all the formal requirements is reviewed, and if there are no reservations, the relevant minister issues an administrative decision authorizing the institution to certify the regulated qualification indicated in the application.

The external quality assurance institution for the certifying institution may be specified in the regulations governing the qualification. The relevant minister also may choose an institution to provide external quality assurance from a list and contract it to fulfil this function for the certifying institution. The certifying institution can begin to certify the given qualification from the date the agreement is signed with the external quality assurance institution.

Bearing in mind the efficiency of the procedure for issuing a decision on certification authority, the minister may appoint other entities to perform this function, such as: a state body, the director of a subordinate organisational unit or one under the minister's supervision, or an entity of a professional self-governed organisation or business organisation.

5.2.2 Reviewing regulated qualifications

Within five years from the date of enacting the IQS Act, all ministers responsible for government departments are obliged to review the qualifications related to the areas they oversee.⁷ This review identifies the qualifications to be included in the IQS in the opinion of the minister.

Following the review, the minister may include a regulated qualification in the IQS, which does not meet the requirements specified in the Act if it is possible:

- 1) to assign a PQF level to this qualification, and
- 2) identify a certifying institution for this qualification.

The minister announces the assigned PQF level for such a qualification and its inclusion in the IQF by an announcement published in the Polish Monitor.

When including a qualification in the IQS in this manner, the minister is obliged to ensure that it meets the requirements specified in the Act within three years from the date of the announcement of its inclusion. If the qualification does not meet the requirements within this time, it will be designated as an archival qualification and announced as such in the Polish Monitor.

⁷ These qualifications are established by separate regulations and awarded according to the conditions defined in the regulations. They do not include qualifications awarded in the formal general, vocational and higher education systems.

6 Quality assurance of qualifications included in the NQF

The quality assurance system for the formal general, vocational and higher education systems reflects the principles and standards presented in the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the EQF, as well as other European documents and guidelines relating to this issue.⁸ However, the quality assurance measures for awarding qualifications outside the formal general, vocational and higher education systems do not always fully meet these standards.

One important aim of the Integrated Qualifications System is to extend the systemic solutions for quality assurance to all qualifications included in the Integrated Qualifications Register. All qualifications for the entire country listed in the Register are subject to uniform quality assurance requirements, consistent with European guidelines.

Qualifications' quality assurance in the general, vocational and higher education systems continues to be supervised by relevant ministers. Responsibility for the quality assurance of qualifications under the direct or indirect authority of other ministers will remain there and are overseen according to the principles defined in the IQS Act. The IQS Act assumes that the process of awarding qualifications is included in the quality assurance system. As a result, the key definitions, description of entities and their tasks relating to quality assurance directly concern the process of awarding qualifications.

6.1 Quality assurance of qualifications awarded in the formal education sector

The formal general, vocation and higher education systems were modernised before the introduction of the Polish Qualifications Framework and the Integrated Qualifications System. Between 2008 and 2011, the general education and vocational education systems were reformed, aimed at introducing learning outcomes as the primary reference point for education policies. Key changes were introduced in higher education in 2011 (Referencing Report, 2013; Dębowski, and Stęchły, 2015).

6.1.1 Formal general and vocational education system

All schools in the formal general and vocational education have external and internal quality assurance systems in place.

⁸ *European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET), validation – European Guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning* (CEDEFOP 2009) and higher education – *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*.

External quality assurance is provided by the system of pedagogical supervision. External pedagogical supervision is conducted by Regional Education Authorities (REA) (*kurator oświaty*), which are supervised by the Minister of National Education. Pedagogical supervision covers three aspects: evaluation, an audit of legal compliance and support.⁹

The Head of the Regional Education Authority prepares an annual report on the results of the educational supervision and presents it to the Minister of National Education.

School principals are obliged by law to design and implement an internal quality assurance system, which should be done in cooperation with teachers. School principals are relatively free in how they design and implement these systems, but they are required to include the three aspects of pedagogical supervision mentioned above: evaluation, compliance audit and support. Internal evaluation is carried out annually and its results are taken into consideration in the external evaluation. In order to help school principals develop and implement internal quality assurance procedures, the National Centre for Supporting Vocational and Continuing Education prepared "Quality Standards for VET" (2013), a document covering ten thematic areas related to quality assurance in VET,¹⁰ which are in line with the 2009 EQARF/EQAVET Recommendation. This document can be used by schools voluntarily.

The system of external examinations is a key element in ensuring and improving the quality of education and the qualifications attained in school. The Central Examination Board and eight Regional Examination Boards are responsible for organising external examinations. The external examination system is supervised by the Minister of National Education. In the external examination system, all examinees solve the same problems to verify whether they have achieved the learning outcomes defined in the core curriculum. Trained examiners registered at the Regional Examination Boards assess examination results. The Central Examination Board analyses aggregate test and examination results and initiates research in the field of assessment. Results of external examinations are taken into consideration in both external and internal quality assurance as part of pedagogical supervision.

The collection and dissemination of information on the formal general and vocational education system by the School Information System is an important element in ensuring the quality of qualifications in Poland. The School Information System is maintained in electronic form and

⁹ Schools are evaluated according to uniform requirements set in the legislation, on such aspects as: the concept and organisation of work; educational processes; the implementation of the core curriculum; active participation, and support for the development, of pupils / students; shaping social attitudes and respect for social norms; cooperation among teachers, and with parents and the local community; and management. The audit of legal compliance verifies whether the activities undertaken by schools comply with relevant legislation. For more information, see the Eurydice Report for Poland.

¹⁰ The ten thematic areas of the quality standards are: (1) teaching programmes; (2) school staff; (3) school material resources; (4) organisation of teaching; (5) students with special needs; (6) cooperation with employers; (7) cooperation with domestic and international partners; (8) assessment and validation of learning outcomes; (9) counselling; (10) strategic management of the school.

uses the Internet to provide information collected under the terms of a legal act.¹¹ Each school and educational institution must submit data regarding the number and categories of pupils, teachers, facilities, expenses, etc. Submission of data is done individually by each school through a web application. Information is collected regionally and then exported by Regional Education Authorities to the Ministry of National Education. Each user group (ministries, Central Statistical Office, local authorities, etc.) has access to its relevant part of the data base. Some information is available to the public. The system has been functioning this way since 2012.

6.1.2 Higher education

In Poland, higher education institutions are directly responsible for the quality of awarded qualifications and the study programmes leading to them. They are legally required to operate an internal quality assurance system. The purpose of the external quality assurance system in higher education is primarily to verify the functioning of the internal quality assurance systems of higher education institutions. The minister responsible for higher education defines the basic premises of these systems by formulating:

- the requirements for describing qualifications,
- the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education, which includes descriptions of learning outcomes for the eight broad areas of study,
- the organisational requirements of higher education institutions, especially with regard to the number and qualifications of staff required to offer studies in specific fields,
- the requirements of the study programme,
- the principles of programme and institutional assessment of higher education institutions.

Higher education institutions are required by law to be assessed by the Polish Accreditation Committee (their programmes or institutions) which submits the results of its assessments to the Minister of Science and Higher Education.

Assessments can also be performed by an institutions established by the academic community or an international accreditation body. The Polish Accreditation Committee (PAC) – an independent entity acting on the basis of the Act on higher education – performs external assessments of the quality of education, as well as of the qualifications awarded. PAC is a member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and is also registered with the European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies (EQAR). It also belongs to the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA), the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEENQA) and the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE). PAC performs its activities in accordance with the “Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area”.

¹¹ Act of 15 April 2011 on the School Information System (Journal of Laws 2011, no. 139, item 814).

PAC accredits programmes and institutions. Programme accreditation includes an assessment of, among others:

- the congruency of the learning outcomes determined by the higher education institution for a given study programme with the descriptors for the given field in the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education,
- the ability to attain these learning outcomes given the conditions under which these studies are offered and the educational process,
- the propriety of validating the learning outcomes.

An institutional accreditation takes into account the following issues, among others:

- the operation and improvement of internal quality assurance systems for education,
- the accreditation or certification received from international institutions by the faculties of the higher education institution,
- the results of the previously performed programme accreditation.

The assessment procedure conducted by PAC is free of charge, mandatory and cyclical. In the case of a negative assessment, the minister responsible for higher education revokes or suspends the ability to provide higher education.

6.2 Quality assurance of qualifications awarded outside formal general, vocational and higher education systems

New systemic solutions for ensuring the quality of qualifications came into force with the Act of 22 December 2015 on the Integrated Qualifications System. The Act does not affect the principles or mechanisms of quality assurance in the formal general, vocations and higher education systems.

According to the IQS Act, the quality assurance of qualifications awarded outside the formal general, vocational and higher education systems consists of overseeing validation and certification, which are the responsibility of the relevant ministers. Certifying institutions are obliged to submit activity reports to the relevant ministers at least once every two years.

According to the IQS Act, each certifying institution functioning outside the formal general, vocational and higher education systems must have internal and external quality assurance systems for their validation and certification activities. The main premise of quality assurance is that it is considered from the point of view of the individual who attains the qualification.

The aim of a certifying institution's internal quality assurance system is to ensure that validation and certification are carried out properly and improved. To accomplish this:

- the education and training process is separated from the validation process,

- validation and certification are continuously monitored and assessed,
- validation and certification regularly undergo an internal evaluation.

External quality assurance consists of:

- monitoring the internal quality assurance system used by the certifying institution,
- regularly verifying compliance with the requirements of the Act on the IQS by the certifying institution,
- conducting regular external evaluations of validation and certification in the certifying institution and of its internal quality assurance system.

The minister coordinator of the IQS maintains a list of entities authorized to provide external quality assurance and announces a call for institutions to join this list at least once every three years. The list is publicly available in the IQS portal.

The entity interested in becoming an external quality assurance institutions submits an application for inclusion to the relevant minister through the IQS portal. The fee for the application is 2 000.00 PLN. The application requests information on:

- the applicant,
- the groups of qualifications, for which the entity would like to conduct external quality assurance activities,
- the names of the employees together with information on their educational background and professional experience related to the activities that will be carried out.

An external quality assurance institution (EQAI) can be an entity (conducting business activity or an individual) that has at least 10 years of experience in carrying out organised activities in a field related to the economy, labour market, education or training. The entity cannot be a certifying institution for the groups of qualifications whose quality will be assessed. It must have an internal quality assurance system in place to ensure the quality of the processes carried out.

The EQAI should have adequately trained personnel, who as a team will have knowledge about the integrated qualifications system, the principles of validation and experience in the validation of learning outcomes acquired through formal and non-formal education and informal learning, as well as knowledge of the principles of the internal and external quality assurance of awarding qualifications and experience in conducting evaluations or audits.

As the operator of the Integrated Qualifications Register, PARP performs an assessment of the formal aspects of a submitted application within 14 days. If the application does not meet the formal requirements, the applicant has 30 days to make corrections. If the formal aspects of the application are fulfilled, it is sent to the minister coordinator of the IQS, who appoints a commission to evaluate the application.

The commission consists of:

- a chairperson representing the minister coordinator of the IQS,
- one representative of each relevant minister responsible for the administrative departments related to the specific areas of the groups of qualifications indicated in the application,
- three representatives of the IQS Stakeholders Council.

Entry on the list of EQAI is valid for a period of 6 years. The IQS minister coordinator may extend an institution's inclusion on the list for an additional six years, if the institution has properly performed its assigned functions and after consultation with the relevant ministers responsible for the qualifications, for which the institution carried out external quality assurance activities.

The relevant minister for a given qualification appoints an EQAI by signing an agreement with the institution with a three month notice of cancellation. When choosing an institution, the minister takes into account the effectiveness and rationality of the use of existing resources and the principle of evenly dividing duties among the institutions on the list. Additionally, a maximum of 5 entities from the list can be appointed as the EQAI for one market qualification. These institutions are required to cooperate in order to ensure a consistent standard of quality for the certification of a given market qualification.

A market qualification is considered to be functioning in the IQS from the date the agreement between the Minister and the external quality assurance institution is signed. Also, from this day, certifying institutions can begin certification activities.

The EQAI is required to submit a report at least once every five years on its activities related to external quality assurance and prepares recommendations of changes to improve the quality of the processes associated with awarding a given qualification and the functioning of the internal quality assurance system of an awarding body. The report contains, among others, an analysis of validation and certification, an analysis and evaluation of the internal quality assurance system, a description of eventual irregularities and recommendations for changes to improve the quality of validation, certification and internal procedures.

The EQAI monitors the internal quality assurance system based on internal evaluation reports submitted to the relevant minister and information provided by the certifying institution to the operator of the Integrated Qualifications Register. In addition, the EQAI may observe the tasks associated with validation carried out by the certifying institution.

The minister coordinator of the IQS may inspect the EQAI to verify that the tasks related to external quality assurance are carried out properly. The relevant minister also may submit a request to the minister coordinator to carry out such an inspection. Should irregularities be found, the EQAI is required to correct them or be removed from the list.

Awarding bodies are required to submit activity reports to their relevant ministers at least once every two years. In addition, an awarding body must conduct an internal evaluation for each market qualification that it has been authorized to certify at least once every three years. The report of the internal evaluation includes:

- an analysis of the documentation on how validation and certification is carried out,
- an assessment of the methods used to comply with the requirements and in terms of the accuracy of methods and criteria used,
- information on activities undertaken to improve validation and certification methods,
- information on measures to improve the internal quality assurance system.

The certifying institution submits its internal evaluation reports to the EQAI and the operator of the Integrated Qualifications Register.

In addition, the certifying institution submits information on the number of certificates issued and the fees charged for validation and certification and the revenue collected from these fees at the end of each quarter to the operator of the Integrated Qualifications Register.

If there are suspicions that irregularities are occurring in the certifying institution, the relevant minister may order the EQAI to conduct a non-scheduled evaluation or may independently perform an audit of the certifying institution. The IQS Act provides procedures to ensure the impartiality of the inspection process. The inspection report includes, among others, a description of the established facts, including the irregularities found, their scope, causes and effects, along with the names and functions of those responsible for causing them, and recommendations for corrective actions. In the case of an external evaluation report prepared by the EQAI, the same information is included without providing the names of those responsible for any irregularities.

The relevant minister may rescind certification authority in cases where:

- the certifying institution issues certificates to persons who have not been positively validated,
- glaring irregularities are found as the result of an inspection or external evaluation,
- the certifying institution has not taken corrective action in spite of the recommendations received,
- the certifying institution no longer meets the conditions set out in the IQS Act, e.g. the conditions related to organisational issues or personnel.

6.3 Review of the qualifications functioning in the Integrated Qualifications System

Qualifications shall be reviewed not less than once every ten years. The time of the review is stated in the announcement that the qualification has been included in the IQS, published in the Polish Monitor.

The relevant minister may review the qualification at another time in cases justified by economic or social need.

The review takes place in consultation with relevant stakeholders, and then the opinions are sought of specialists with the same experiences and the same competences as the experts who were involved in preparing the opinion during the process of including the qualification in the IQS (for more information, see Chapter 6, Procedures of the inclusion of qualifications included in the NQF).

The appointed specialists prepare a recommendation on the future functioning of the qualification in the IQS, its eventual modification or to discontinue its awarding due to the lack of a justification for its functioning. The final decision on the outcome of the review of the qualification is made by the relevant minister.

7 Costs of including non-formal sector qualifications in the NQF

7.1 Basic premises of financing the IQS

Implementation of the IQS does not affect the way qualifications are established and awarded in the formal general, vocational and higher education systems, thus it does not affect the way these systems are financed nor the amounts they receive from the state budget.

Implementing systemic solutions for qualifications awarded outside the formal general, vocational and higher education systems is supported by funding from the European Social Fund. The process of implementing the IQS through the use of ESF funds does not require national co-financing.

The attainment of new qualifications by different groups of people (workers, people interested or forced by circumstances to change jobs, unemployed persons) is financed by various means. It may involve public funds (e.g. from the Labour Fund for employment offices, the National Training Fund and the European Social Fund), funds allocated for this purpose by employers, as well as the personal funds of individuals seeking to attain qualifications. These costs did not change as a result of IQS implementation.

There are, however, a number of additional costs related to IQS implementation resulting from the need to finance new elements of the system – the Integrated Qualifications Register, the IQS Stakeholders Council, the work of comparing the required learning outcomes of a qualification with PQF level descriptors (assigning PQF level to qualification), and the requirement to implement external quality assurance systems in certifying institutions (see Chapters 6 and 7). In addition, the ministers are incurring costs associated with the processing of applications to register qualifications and become a certifying institution.

Once the IQS is fully implemented, these additional costs to the budget will be offset by budget revenues from fees paid by the institutions participating in the system. These are one-time charges related to the submission of applications for the inclusion of qualifications in the IQS (see Section 8.2), to become a certifying institution or to be included in the list of external quality assurance institutions. There are also fixed charges related to income received from the process of awarding qualification. The fees were calculated to allow the IQS to function as a self-financing system after its initial implementation period. It is assumed that the amount of the fees will be adjusted, if necessary, in line with this assumption.

Taking the above premises into consideration, it is expected that the IQS system should generate revenues in excess of maintenance costs in about 20 years of operation (generated revenues should exceed costs around 2030). During the period when the difference between

costs and revenues will be the highest, that is, in the first few years of operation, the costs of implementing the IQS will be financed from the European Social Fund.

7.2 Types of costs In the IQS

Three types of costs associated with the functioning and implementation of the IQS in Poland can be distinguished, which are born by different institutions:

- implementation costs: costs of developing and implementing the IQS (including designing procedures to establish qualifications, setting up the Integrated Qualifications Register). These are one-time costs borne by the state budget. Most of these costs will be financed from the European Social Fund.
- fixed costs related to the functioning of the IQS system: mainly the costs of maintaining the IQR. These costs are borne by the state budget and most will be financed by the European Social Fund during the first years of the IQS implementation. After 2022, these costs will be financed by the state budget and fees paid by awarding bodies who applied to have their qualifications included in the IQR.
- variable costs: these costs vary with the number of qualifications submitted to be included in the IQS. The more qualifications submitted, the more work will have to be done by the public administration to process the applications (more analyses to be performed, PQF levels to be assigned, additional costs incurred for external quality assurance). Variable costs are mostly financed by the collected fees.

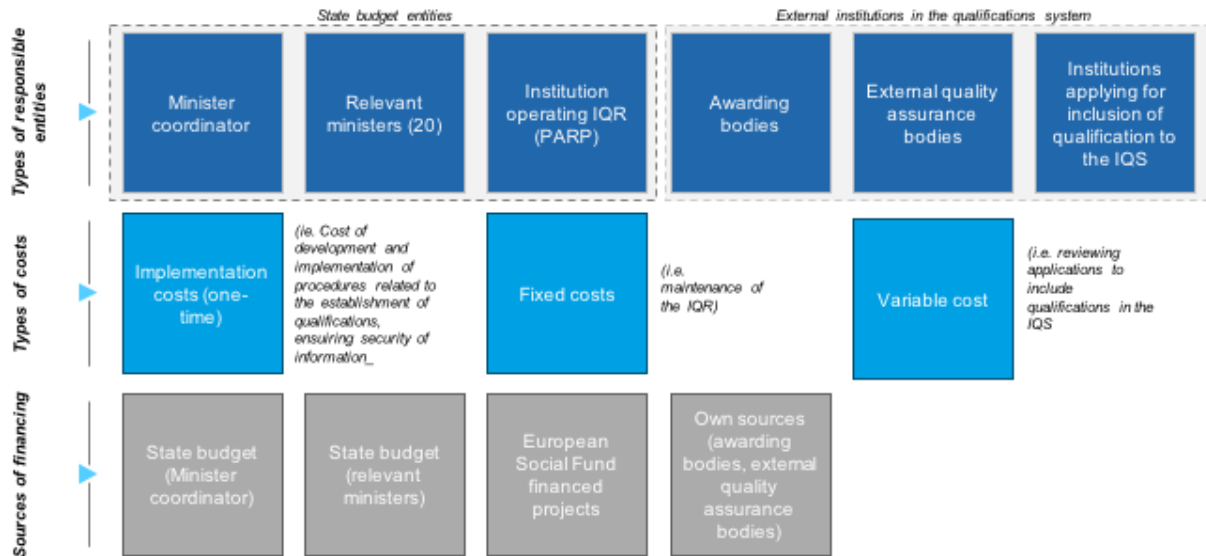
There are several types of fees in the IQS system:

- application fee for including a qualifications in the IQS (this process is described in Chapter 6). Any organisation or institution that applies to include a market qualification to the PQF pays a fee of 2,000 PLN (approx. 500 EUR).
- application fee for becoming an awarding body. Any organisation or institution that applies to become an awarding body is charged a fee. This fee is 10,000 PLN (approx. 2,500 EUR).
- quarterly fee paid by awarding bodies. There is an ongoing quarterly charge for awarding bodies in the amounts of 3% of revenue from fees charged during the process of awarding qualifications.
- application fee for organisations and institutions that want to be included on the list of external quality assurance institutions. This fee is 2,000 PLN (approx. 500 EUR).

All fees are paid to an account of the state budget. The state budget finances the costs of state budget entities.

A summary of the different types of costs and sources of financing is presented in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3. Institutions, types of cost and sources of financing in the Polish system.



8. Current debates on further NQF developments – implementation of the Act of 22 December 2015 on the Integrated Qualifications System (IQS)

Preceding chapters present the architecture of the Integrated Qualifications System and the procedures described in the IQS law with particular attention to procedures of inclusion qualifications in the IQS. This chapter describes the measures that have been taken to ensure that the IQS could be successfully implemented.

The implementation of the IQS based on the Polish Qualifications Framework is considered one of the key actions of the Polish government in developing policies aimed at increasing the quality of human capital in Poland. Therefore, after passage of the IQS Act, national authorities wanted to make the system functional as quickly as possible so that qualifications could be included in the IQS, and at the same time, awarding bodies could begin awarding qualifications that had been assigned a PQF level. Particularly important is treated the inclusion of qualifications awarded outside of school sector.

This chapter is divided into three parts. The first part addresses the development of the legal and organisational infrastructure of the IQS. The second part describes activities undertaken to prepare the entities involved in operating the IQS. The third part describes first stage of the functioning of the IQS.

The information in this chapter spans the time from January 2016, when the IQS Act implementing the NQF came into force, to September 2017 – the date this report was finalised.

8.1. Developing the legal and organisational infrastructure of the IQS

8.1.1 Implementing regulations for the IQS Act

One of the tasks of the Minister of National Education resulting from the IQS Act was to issue implementing regulations to the IQS Act. Since the passage of the IQS Act, a total of 13 implementing regulations have been issued, as follows:

- 1) Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 12 April 2016 on the technical requirements to be met in the application for submitting information to the Integrated Qualifications Register (Journal of Laws of 2016, item 498);
- 2) Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 13 April 2016 on the second stage descriptors of the Polish Qualifications Framework typical for general qualifications – levels 1–4 (Journal of Laws 2016, item 498);

- 3) Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 13 April 2016 on the second stage descriptors of the Polish Qualifications Framework typical for vocational qualifications – levels 1–8 (Journal of Laws 2016, item 520);
- 4) Regulation of the Minister of National Education and the Minister of Science and Higher Education of 17 June 2016 on the second stage descriptors of the Polish Qualifications Framework typical for qualifications attained after having achieved a full qualification at level 4 – level 5 (Journal of Laws of 2016, item 547);
- 5) Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 13 July 2016 on the graphic marks informing about the Polish Qualifications Framework levels assigned to the full and partial qualification included in the Integrated Qualifications System (Journal of Laws of 2016, item 915);
- 6) Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 3 August 2016 on the scope of information collected in the Integrated Qualifications Register on qualifications awarded after having completed postgraduate studies (Journal of Laws of 2016, item 1022);
- 7) Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 19 August 2016 on the conditions to be met by experts appointed to the team of experts, the procedure of appointing experts and the procedure of comparing the learning outcomes required for a qualification with the level descriptors of the Polish Qualifications Framework (Journal of Laws of 2016, item 1204);
- 8) Regulation of the Minister of Science and Higher Education of 26 September 2016 on the second stage descriptors of the Polish Qualifications Framework typical for qualifications attained in higher education after having achieved a full qualification at level 4 – levels 6–8 (Journal of Laws 2016 r., item 1321);
- 9) Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 10 October 2016 on the bylaws of the work of the commission assessing applications for inclusion in the list of entities authorised to perform external quality assurance, a model of the contract with an entity entrusted with the performance of external quality assurance, and the manner of determining the amount of payment for such a contract (Journal of Laws of 2016, item 1594).
- 10) Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 16 January 2017 on the Polish Qualifications Framework levels for full qualifications awarded until 15 January 2016 (Journal of Laws of 2017, item 133);
- 11) Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 3 April 2017 amending the regulation on the graphic mark informing about the Polish Qualifications Framework levels assigned to full and partial qualifications included in the Integrated Qualifications System (Journal of Laws of 2017, item 764);
- 12) Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 18 May 2017 on the Sectoral Qualifications Framework for the Tourism Sector (Journal of Laws of 2017, item 1155);

13) Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 21 June 2017 on the Sectoral Qualifications Framework for the Sport Sector (Journal of Laws of 2017, item 1268).

Implementing regulations 1 through 9 **enabled Poland to achieve a fully functional Integrated Qualifications System.**

8.1.2 IQS Portal and Integrated Qualifications Register

Preparations to establish the Integrated Qualifications System portal and the Integrated Qualifications Register (IQR) were important activities undertaken to implement the IQS Act. The IQS Portal and IQR were launched on 15 July 2016.

The IQS Portal operates as part of the governmental domain at kwalifikacje.gov.pl. The IQS Portal serves all persons and institutions working together within the IQS or who need information. The portal provides the legal acts on the IQS and information on: the activities undertaken by the government on behalf of lifelong learning, the functioning of the IQS and the progress in developing the system. Documents, manuals and publications can be downloaded from the portal. The portal is regularly updated.

The IQS Portal is also an electronic forum for communication and cooperation in the tasks performed within the IQS. Through the portal, all formal applications (for example, to include a market qualification in the IQS, to apply for certification authority) are submitted to the ministers responsible for a given qualification. The portal also includes all announcements and communications about the required procedures of the IQS. The IQS Portal can be accessed through currently used web browsers via computers, tablets, and smartphones.

The Integrated Qualifications Register is a very important part of the IQS Portal, as it contains the most important information about each qualification included in the IQS. The IQR collects information on qualifications, regardless of other existing registers and lists of qualifications in Poland. The IQR operates entirely in an IT system at rejestr.kwalifikacje.gov.pl.

8.1.3 Stakeholders Council of the IQS

On July 13, 2016, the Minister of National Education appointed the Stakeholders Council (see: Regulation No. 35 of the Minister of National Education on the appointment of members of the IQS Stakeholders Council¹²). Pursuant to this regulation, 14 members were appointed to a 2-year term and 15 persons to a 4-year term on the Stakeholders Council of the IQS.

The Stakeholders Council is made up of representatives of employers, employees, the education community, the scientific and professional communities, the training market, local

¹²http://www.kwalifikacje.gov.pl/download/Prawo_o_ZSK/Zarządzenie_w_sprawie_powołania_rady_interesariuszy.pdf

government, the Central Examination Board (CKE) and the minister coordinator of the IQS – see section 2.2 for the competencies of the Stakeholders Council.

As of September 2017, the IQS Stakeholders Council has met four times. Detailed minutes from each meeting are available to the public on the IQS Portal¹³.

8.1.4 Inter-ministerial Taskforce for Lifelong Learning and the Integrated Qualifications System

In May 2016, the *Inter-ministerial Taskforce for Lifelong Learning and the Integrated Qualifications System* was established by a regulation issued by the Prime Minister. The Taskforce is an auxiliary body of the Prime Minister, chaired by the Minister of National Education, who serves as the minister coordinator of the IQS.

The tasks of the Taskforce include, in particular:

- 1) monitoring the implementation and functioning of the Integrated Qualifications System, to be consistent with the European Qualifications Framework;
- 2) monitoring the implementation solutions for lifelong learning in the Republic of Poland, including the development of knowledge and skills important for an innovative economy, employment and a cohesive society;
- 3) preparing drafts of modifications to the government document on lifelong learning strategies;
- 4) cooperating with partners and institutions relevant to the development of lifelong learning, including the Stakeholders Council of the Integrated Qualifications System;
- 5) monitoring of work conducted in the European Union in the field of lifelong learning, including the European Qualifications Framework.

The Taskforce consists of:

- 1) Taskforce Chairperson – Minister of National Education;
- 2) Other members:
 - a. Minister of Digital Affairs,
 - b. Minister of Maritime Economy and Inland Navigation,
 - c. Minister of Culture and National Heritage,
 - d. Minister of Science and Higher Education,
 - e. Minister of National Defence,
 - f. Minister of Family, Labour and Social Policy,

¹³<http://www.kwalifikacje.gov.pl/rada-interesariuszy>

- g. Minister of Development,
- h. Minister of Sport and Tourism,
- i. Minister of Interior and Administration,
- j. Minister of Health,
- k. Minister from the Chancellery of the Prime Minister.

8.1.5 The Inter-ministerial Cooperating Network for IQS Implementation

At the request of the minister coordinator, a cooperating network was established of staff from various ministries involved in the implementation of the tasks resulting from the Act on the Integrated Qualifications System as well as the development of the government's integrated skills strategy. Also appointed were members of ministerial departments, who are supervising the implementation of these tasks.

8.1.6 Amendments to the IQS Act

In 2016, the IQS Act was amended twice. In 2017, the entity operating the Integrated Qualifications Register was changed from the Polish Agency for Enterprise Development (PARP) to the Educational Research Institute (IBE).

From the date the IQS Act entered into force, the Ministry of National Education and IBE have been monitoring the solutions being enacted. For this purpose, questions, remarks and proposed amendments have been gathered during meetings, seminars, workshops and consultations, organised for ministry representatives, entities receiving support with the process of describing a qualification, awarding bodies, external quality assurance entities, and IQS stakeholders.

8.1.7 List of external quality assurance entities

Applications began to be accepted for the appointment of external quality assurance entities in 2016.

By September 2017, 14 entities were listed as qualified to perform external quality assurance:

Maritime Academy in Szczecin, Butra Consulting Andrzej Butra, Medical Centre for Postgraduate Education in Warsaw, Public Affairs Institute Foundation, Warsaw Institute of Banking, Central Mining Institute, Gomułka Group Euroeducation Company Ltd., Institute of Nuclear Chemistry and Technology, Oil and Gas Institute – National Research Institute, Institute for Sustainable Technologies – National Research Institute, Institute of Tourism in Kraków Ltd., National Chamber of Real Estate, Silesian Medical University, Wielkopolska Academy of Science and Development Jakub Michałowski.

8.1.8 Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks

By September 2017, two sectoral qualification frameworks, one for tourism and one for sport, were incorporated into the IQS under the following regulations:

- Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 18 May 2017 on the Sectoral Qualifications Framework for the tourism sector included the Sectoral Qualifications Framework for the tourism sector in the IQS. The regulation entered into force on 4 July 2017.
- Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 21 June 2017 on the Sectoral Qualifications Framework for the sport sector included the Sectoral Qualifications Framework for the sport sector in the IQS. The regulation entered into force on 13 July 2017¹⁴.

8.1.9 Educational Research Institute

As previously described, the Educational Research Institute has been involved in the development of the IQS since 2010. IBE was the centre, from which the work was conducted on developing the new qualifications system, as well as being the centre for the public debates on this issue.

On 19 January 2016, acting pursuant to the IQS Act, the Minister of National Education, as the coordinator of the IQS, authorised the Educational Research Institute to carry out the following tasks¹⁵:

- 1) prepare the ministers to implement the solutions of the IQS, including the provision of support to the minister coordinator of the IQS with activities relating to the functioning of the list of external quality assurance entities, monitoring and evaluation, and developing recommendations to ensure that the applied solutions are coherent;
- 2) prepare awarding bodies and validation institutions to implement the solutions of the IQS;
- 3) prepare solutions and methods for identifying and documenting the competences of persons seeking to attain qualifications, including methods of recognising competences attained outside of organised forms of learning;
- 4) prepare external quality assurance entities to perform external evaluations;
- 5) coordinate the work on developing descriptions of qualification awarded outside of the school and higher education systems in accordance with the standards of the IQS;
- 6) cooperate with representatives of relevant communities to develop sectoral qualifications frameworks referenced to the Polish Qualifications Framework;
- 7) monitor and evaluate the development of the Integrated Qualifications System, including the preparation of reports on the IQS and monitoring solutions from abroad;

¹⁴Journal of Laws of 2017, item 1268.

¹⁵Quoted from the document of the Ministry of National Education of 19 January 2016.

- 8) disseminate information on the Integrated Qualifications System in Poland and in the international community and operate the IQS Portal, including cooperation with the entity operating the IQR in modifications to the existing solutions on the procedures and operation of the information system and in including updates resulting from developments to the IQS, as well as support the entity operating the IQR in preparing and launching the IQR;
- 9) develop systematic tools to monitor the professional careers of school graduates;
- 10) monitor the professional careers of vocational school graduates for the 2015–2022 edition, with the use of the developed solutions.

IBE proceeded to implement these activities within the framework of an ESF-funded systemic project: *Support to central government administration, awarding bodies and quality assurance institutions in implementing stage I of the Integrated Qualifications System*, undertaken in 2016–2018.

There is evidence that the support provided by IBE to stakeholders is useful. There is great interest in regional conferences and thematic seminars. Every week, IBE experts receive questions and requests for consultations. Also, the publications issued by IBE are considered highly supportive. Stakeholders are especially interested in the printed versions, therefore key publications have been reprinted already several times.

By decision of the relevant authorities, IBE will be continuing these activities based on successive projects financed from European sources.

8.2. The substantive preparation of the entities involved in the functioning of the IQS

All necessary supporting and instructional materials have been developed to explain the functioning of the IQS. Informational seminars and workshop sessions are also being held for different target groups.

8.2.1 Instructional and supportive material for various entities

Developing procedures

Procedures have been developed on cooperation between the minister coordinator of the IQS and relevant ministers, as well as with other entities involved in the process of including qualifications in the IQS. In total, 12 procedures have been developed, which have a universal character. They are designed in such a way that they can be adapted to the experiences and conditions of individual ministries. The minister coordinator has provided the procedures to the relevant ministers responsible for given qualifications, as proposals for use.

Procedures have been developed on the following activities, based on the IQS Act:

- 1) Including market qualification in the IQS,
- 2) Determination the relevant minister to consider an application for having a market qualification included in the IQS,
- 3) Organising and conducting consultations with interested communities,
- 4) Securing the opinions of experts on the purpose of including qualifications in the IQS,
- 5) Setting up a panel of experts to determine the PQF level for qualifications,
- 6) Preparing the recommendation of the team of experts on the PQF level assigned to qualifications,
- 7) Granting authorisation to award qualifications,
- 8) Granting authorisation to perform the role of external quality assurance entity (entry in the EQAE list),
- 9) Performing extraordinary external evaluations of awarding bodies,
- 10) Performing audits of the awarding body,
- 11) Including regulated (statutory) qualifications in the IQS,
- 12) Reviewing regulated qualifications.

Manuals on particular topics and activities pertaining to the IQS

IBE has produced numerous publications on topics on implementing the IQS. These materials serve as a compendium of knowledge for those who are involved in its implementation. They have been prepared especially with the staffs of government authorities and other institutions in mind, who will be performing specific tasks in developing and awarding qualifications. These publications allow persons to become familiar with the new terminology and the Polish Qualifications Framework; explain how to include qualifications into the system; they are a primary source of information for interested parties applying to have qualifications included in the system, as well as for those applying to become awarding bodies and external quality assurance entities.

The most relevant publications include:

- 1) The Pocket Encyclopaedia of the Integrated Qualifications System
<http://www.kwalifikacje.gov.pl/images/Publikacje/mala-encyklopedia-IQS.pdf>
- 2) Glossary of the Integrated Qualifications System
http://www.kwalifikacje.edu.pl/download/slownik_zsk_2017.pdf
- 3) Polish Qualifications Framework
<http://www.kwalifikacje.edu.pl/en/publications/1259-polish-qualifications-framework>
- 4) Polish Qualifications Framework – User’s Guide
<http://www.kwalifikacje.edu.pl/en/publications/1258-polish-qualifications-framework-user-s-guide>
- 5) How to describe market qualifications for the Polish Qualifications System
<http://www.kwalifikacje.edu.pl/en/publications/1148-how-to-describe-market-qualifications-for-the-polish-qualifications-system>
- 6) Assigning levels of the Polish Qualifications Framework to qualifications

<http://www.kwalifikacje.edu.pl/download/publikacje/Przypisywanie-poziomu-PRK-do-kwalifikacji.pdf>

- 7) Including qualifications in the Integrated Qualifications System
http://www.kwalifikacje.edu.pl/download/publikacje/Wlaczanie_kwalifikacji_do_zsk.pdf
- 8) Validation – new opportunities for attaining qualifications
http://www.kwalifikacje.edu.pl/images/download/Publikacje/Walidacja_nowe_mozliwosci_z_dobycia_kwalifikacji_na%20www_2212_FIN.pdf
- 9) The Review of Regulated Qualifications
http://www.kwalifikacje.edu.pl/download/PKU_internet_fin_czerwiec%202017.pdf
- 10) Validation systems from abroad – a review of practices
<http://www.kwalifikacje.edu.pl/images/download/Publikacje/zagraniczne-systemy-walidacji.pdf>

In addition to the publications printed by IBE, the Institute's experts also prepare additional instructional materials, presentations and exercises, which are presented to seminar participants.

8.2.2 Informational seminars and workshops

From January 2016 – June 2017, seminars were held for the following groups:

- Seminars for the staffs of ministries. The seminars were on particular areas regulated in the IQS Act, including: procedures of including qualifications, the Polish Qualifications Framework, quality assurance, sectoral qualifications frameworks. A total of 11 seminars were held in which 344 participants took part. As a result of requests from ministry representatives, further seminars are being prepared.
- Seminars for institutions interested in performing the function of an awarding body. The seminars were on the IQS solutions for validation, certification and quality assurance. A total of 18 two-day seminars were held, in which a total of 357 participants took part.
- Seminars for the staffs of local government units (mainly marshal offices and voivodship labour offices). During the seminars, basic information on the IQS was provided. A total of 18 information seminars were held, with a total of 465 participants.

8.3. First stage of the functioning of the IQS – starting up the system

8.3.1 Entering school qualifications in the Integrated Qualifications Register

Qualifications awarded in the formal education system were included in the IQS under the Act. All these qualifications were included in the Integrated Qualifications Registry in 2016.

Currently, the Register has 9518 qualifications awarded in formal education. 9233 of them are full qualifications and 285 are partial. They have been assigned various PQF levels (from level 1 to 8):

- 1 qualification at level 1¹⁶,
- 10 qualifications at level 2,
- 191 qualifications at level 3,
- 268 qualifications at level 4,
- 39 qualifications at level 5,
- 5035 qualifications at level 6,
- 2998 qualifications at level 7,
- 976 qualifications at level 8.

8.3.2 The inclusion of qualifications awarded outside the formal education system in the IQS

As of September 2017, 23 applications for the inclusion of qualifications awarded outside formal education, including craft trades qualifications, have been submitted by different entities, e.g. foundations, associations, chambers of crafts, training companies. One qualification, „Carpentry Assembly in Construction”, has already been included in the IQS in July 2017.

The following qualifications are currently being processed by the relevant ministries:

- Providing group fitness classes (forwarded to the Ministry of Sport and Tourism)
- Real estate management (Ministry of Infrastructure and Development)
- Tiler – Master’s diploma (Ministry of Infrastructure and Development)
- Tiler – Journeyman’s certificate (Ministry of Infrastructure and Development)
- Beautician – Master’s diploma (Ministry of Economic Development)
- Beautician – Journeyman’s certificate (Ministry of Economic Development)
- Makeup artist / stylist – Master’s diploma (Ministry of Economic Development)
- Makeup artist / stylist – Journeyman’s certificate (Ministry of Economic Development)
- Furniture carpentry – Journeyman’s certificate (Ministry of Economic Development)
- Panel beating and painting – Journeyman’s certificate (Ministry of Economic Development)
- Confectioner – Master’s diploma (Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development)
- Hairdresser/Barber – Master’s diploma (Ministry of Economic Development)
- Guiding tourism events (Ministry of Sport and Tourism)
- BIM Manager certificate (Ministry of Infrastructure and Development)
- Recovery of data from HDD hard drives (Ministry of Digital Affairs)

¹⁶ Certificate of completion of a 6-year elementary school. In 2017, the school system was changed – primary school lasts for 8 years, and then pupils go on to a 4-year general upper secondary school or VET school; lower secondary school has been eliminated.

- Nail styling (Ministry of Economic Development)
- Organising tourism events and services (Ministry of Sport and Tourism)
- Brokering the trading rights of property (Ministry of Infrastructure and Development)
- Certificate of Computer Skills – basic level (Ministry of National Education)
- Real estate management (Ministry of Infrastructure and Development)

According to the above list of qualifications proposed for inclusion, there are many from craftsmanship education which do not have an equivalent in the formal VET system¹⁷. These craft qualifications in the IQS are classified as market qualifications.

Most of the qualifications submitted thus far are rather small (in terms of workload needed to achieve the learning outcomes defined for a particular qualification) and lower PQF levels were proposed for them. This may be explained by the initial stage of the functioning of IQS. In later stages, it is expected that qualifications with larger workloads and higher PQF levels will be submitted for inclusion.

Based on the experiences from the first 20 months, one could say that the concept of the accumulation and transfer of units of learning outcomes was understood by stakeholders and therefore, has a chance of being developed and used further.

The first months of IQS functioning have allowed the process of including qualifications in the system to be assessed (effectiveness of procedures, methods of work, as well as the role and work of institutions, entities involved in particular stages of this process).

Among the others, the duration of the process is now and should be analysed in the future. The IQS Act states that the process of including market qualification into the system should take from 4 to 8 months. The experience gained so far shows that it takes around 8 months. It might be expected that in time, the duration of inclusion process will become shorter.

Another issue relates to defining the relevant minister for a given, submitted market qualification. This was an issue with the qualification of “nail styling”. First it was sent to the Minister of Health. One month later, it was sent to the Minister of National Education, and then finally to the Minister of Economic Development, which began the procedure of inclusion.

Moreover, during the consultation process, which is a required part of inclusion procedure, it was observed that lively discussions were taking place among the sectoral stakeholders. The entities taking part in such consultations are, in some cases, the natural market competitors of the applicants, which may impact the results of the consultations.

8.3.3 Review of regulated qualifications

The IQS Act obliges each minister to review all regulated qualifications that he/she has jurisdiction over with five years of the date that the Act enters into force.

¹⁷ Craft qualifications which have equivalent qualifications in formal vocational education are included in the IQS according to the IQS Act together with the qualifications awarded in the formal education system.

Special materials were developed at IBE, with a tool for evaluating individual regulated qualifications to determine if they should be included in the IQS. At the same time, this tool guides the overall qualitative analysis of specific regulated qualifications, and thus facilitates the identification of requirements that have lost their relevance and gaps that need to be addressed. The development of this tool and the training support provided by IBE to the staffs of the ministries involved in reviewing the qualifications serve to ensure the consistency of the actions undertaken by the various ministries in this regard.

The review of regulated qualifications should be completed in 2020. The intent of the Polish government is to include in the IQS all regulated qualifications that are determined to be current and needed by the labour market as the result of the review.

8.3.4 Describing market qualifications in accordance with the requirements of the IQS Act

From mid-2016, IBE has been providing technical and organisational support to the teams that are describing market qualifications. These teams were selected from among those interested in describing and incorporating qualifications in the IQS.

As part of its support to the teams describing market qualifications, as of June 2017, IBE has organised:

- 9 informational seminars for entities interested in having a market qualification included in the IQS, with over 280 persons taking part,
- 14 consultative meetings on describing market qualifications, with over 300 persons taking part,
- over 150 working meetings on describing qualifications for over 200 experts representing several dozen entities, including, among others: the Polish Craft Association, The Accountants Association in Poland, French-Polish Chamber of Commerce, Scientific and Research Centre for Fire Protection – National Research Institute, Environmental Protection Institute – National Research Institute, Polish Scouting and Guiding Association and the Polish Scouting and Guiding Association of the Republic, 20 Olympic sport associations and the Polish Oncological Psychology Association.

During this period, IBE provided support in describing 31 market qualifications, including 15 qualifications from the craft trades. Some of these qualifications have already been submitted for inclusion in the IQS, the remaining ones will be submitted in the near future.

8.3.5 Developing sectoral qualifications frameworks

By September 2017, two sectoral qualifications frameworks were included in the IQS, one for tourism and the other for sport (see section 8.1.8).

Work is currently underway on two more sectoral qualifications frameworks, one for the personal development services sector, and the second for the construction industry. Work is also being

carried out on the pilot implementation of the sectoral qualifications framework for the telecommunications sector.

In future months, work is planned on additional sectoral frameworks. IBE is supporting these activities, among others, by holding 4 seminars on this topic, attended by 90 persons from various sectors.

8.3.6 Informational activities

In consultation with the minister coordinator of the IQS, IBE is conducting systematic information campaigns in a variety of settings and through mass media. Ministry representatives and IBE experts are presenting the issues on the functioning of the IQS during various conferences being organised in different regions of Poland, focused on education, employment and socio-economic issues. During these events, information materials and publications on the IQS are also distributed.

An important tool in making information accessible as widely as possible to the public is the IQS Portal (<http://www.kwalifikacje.gov.pl/>), which is managed by IBE under the supervision of the Minister of National Education, as the coordinator of the IQS. Information about the IQS is also available on the project's Internet website (<http://www.kwalifikacje.edu.pl/>).

Additionally, press articles, brochures, animations and videos addressed to various target groups are placed on the Internet.

8.3.7 Ongoing monitoring of the IQS implementation process

The IBE prepares and implements a systematic evaluation of the implementation and operation of the IQS. To this end, information is collected and analysed about ongoing activities and the specific research programmes initiated by IBE. The IQS operations included in the monitoring pertain to the qualifications awarded in formal education as well as the awarding of regulated and marketed qualifications. Recommendations from the monitoring are submitted to the minister coordinator of the IQS on a regular basis.

In particular, a research concept was developed for the functioning of qualifications in selected sectors: construction, IT, food service and hospitality, financial services and insurance, i.e. those sectors that have developed a sectoral qualifications. Qualitative and quantitative study methods are being planned for this research programme. There will also be research conducted on the use of the IQS in employment offices, primarily by job counsellors. Projects to monitor the outcomes of formal education have also been prepared.

Annexes

Annex 1. List of the legal acts referred to in the country report (and relevant brief summary)

1. Act of 22 March 1989 on the crafts trades (Journal of Laws 2002, No. 112, item 979 with later amendments).
2. School Education Act of 7 September 1991 (Journal of Laws 2004, No. 256, item 2572 with later amendments).
3. Act of 27 July 2005 on the Law on higher education (Journal of Laws 2012, item 572 with later amendments).
4. Resolution of the Minister of National Education of 23 December 2011 on the classification of vocational school occupations (Journal of Laws 2012, item 7).
5. Act of 22 December 2015 on the Integrated Qualifications System (Journal of Laws 2016, item 64).

Annex 2. Forms used in the procedure of including qualifications in the NQF

Integrated Qualifications Register

Application for a qualification¹⁸

Type of application

Application to include a qualification in the IQS

Name of the qualification

Abbreviation of the name

Type of qualification

Proposed level of the Polish Qualifications Framework

Short description of the qualification and an approximate cost of issuing the document confirming that the qualification has been attained

Notional workload required to attain the qualification [in hours]

Groups that may be interested in attaining the qualification

Prerequisite qualifications required to attain the proposed qualification

Description

¹⁸ The application is filled out electronically on the website of the Integrated Qualifications Register.

List

If applicable, the conditions to be fulfilled by a person who will be undergoing validation

The need for the qualification

References to similar qualifications and qualification in the IQR with common sets of learning outcomes

Typical ways of using the qualification

Requirements for validation and the entities conducting validation

Proposed level in the sectoral qualifications framework (if applicable)

Synthesis of the learning outcomes

Set number

Set name

Level

Notional workload [in hours]

Type of set

Specific learning outcomes and the verification criteria of their attainment

Skills and their verification criteria

Skills

Verification criteria

Comments on the sets of learning outcomes

Information on the institutions authorized to award the qualification

Applicant

Relevant minister

Period of time the document confirming that the qualification has been awarded is valid and the conditions to be met to extend its validity.

Period of time the entry into the IQR is valid

Name of the document confirming that the qualification has been awarded

Entitlements / powers conferred by having attained the qualification

Educational subject code

Polish Classification of Activities code (PKD)

IQR qualification code

Status

Documents

#	Document title

I hereby certify that the information provided in this application for a market qualification to be included in the Integrated Qualifications System is true. I am aware of the legal consequences of making a false declaration.