

A new way of thinking

| Lifelong learning

A new approach

| Learning outcomes are key

A new way of organising qualifications and new opportunities to gain them

| The Polish Qualifications Framework



*European
-style qualifications*



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The national qualifications system will change education in Poland and the Polish labour market. This is an issue that affects us all, including the generation which is now preparing to enter the labour market and those who aim to pursue lifelong learning and development. This brochure provides basic information on the Polish Qualifications Framework and on how education in Europe is changing – from primary to postgraduate, apprentice to engineer. More information can be found online at www.kwalifikacje.edu.pl and at our dedicated conferences and events.

“The development of terms of reference for the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework and the National Qualifications Register for lifelong learning” project team at the Educational Research Institute.

What a person knows, is able to do and takes responsibility for in professional, public and personal life are most important, not what was taught at school or university or how long was spent there. The pace of change in the labour market is driving the need for new approaches to education. Of key significance are the learning outcomes we achieve throughout life – how we use our knowledge, skills and social competence. The key will be to develop, learn and gain new qualifications.

Under the project “The development of terms of reference for the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework and the National Qualifications Register for lifelong learning”, a team of experts at the Educational Research Institute is working on the Polish Qualifications Framework, a key tool for changing approaches to learning and investing in human capital in Poland.

These days it is not always clear what competences lay behind a diploma or certificate, making it difficult for employers to assess whether a given candidate is the right choice for their company.

Under the Polish Qualifications Framework, it will be possible to organise learning outcomes, which on the one hand will streamline the search for work and on the other will simplify the recruitment of employees capable of guaranteeing business development and strengthening their employers' positions in the open European market. The new qualifications system will also streamline the confirmation of competences gained outside of the school system.

The Polish Qualifications Framework (PQF) will ensure the cohesive organisation of learning outcomes achieved at various stages of education (general, higher and vocational). Specific learning outcomes will be required at each level, i.e. specific knowledge, skills and social competence. Those who confirm requirements at a given stage through an examination will gain a qualification – a diploma or certificate. However, the means

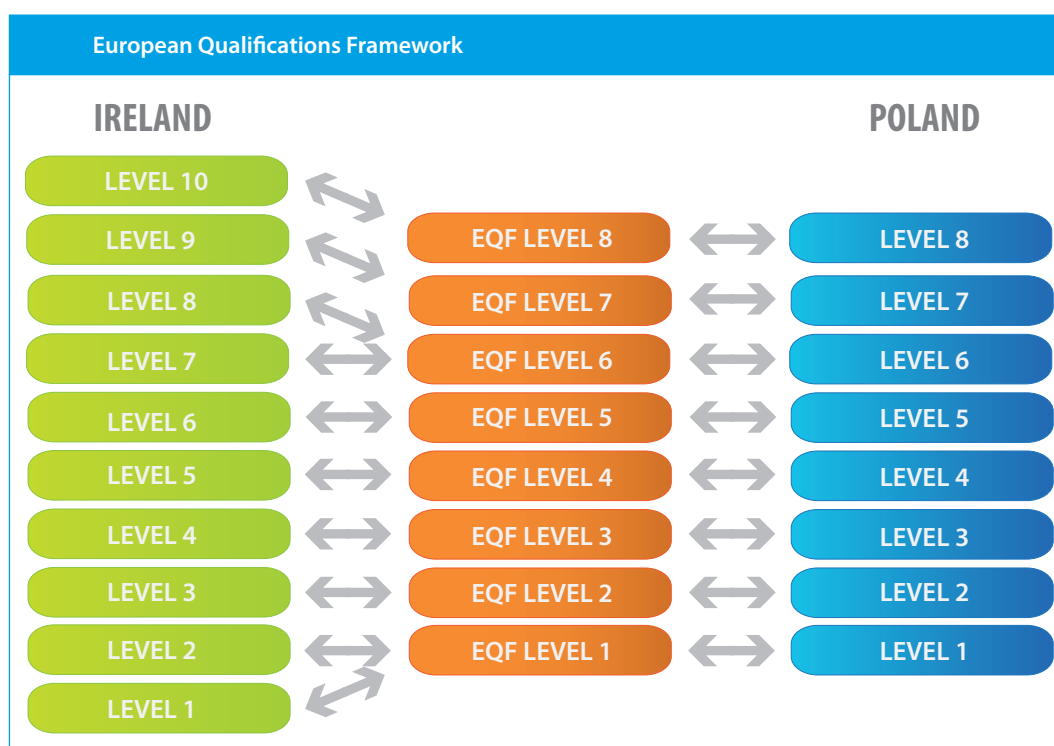
of studying and the way in which these competences have been gained – formal (from primary school to doctoral studies), non-formal (courses, workshops, training programmes) or informal (work experience, online) – will be irrelevant.



The Polish and European qualifications frameworks

Work on the Polish Qualifications Framework is part of a process covering the entire European Union, and is linked to facilitating mobility in the open EU labour market and promoting the concept of lifelong learning.

The Polish Qualifications Framework will be referenced to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), a system implemented to facilitate freedom of movement within the European labour market and to better adapt qualifications to employers' expectations.

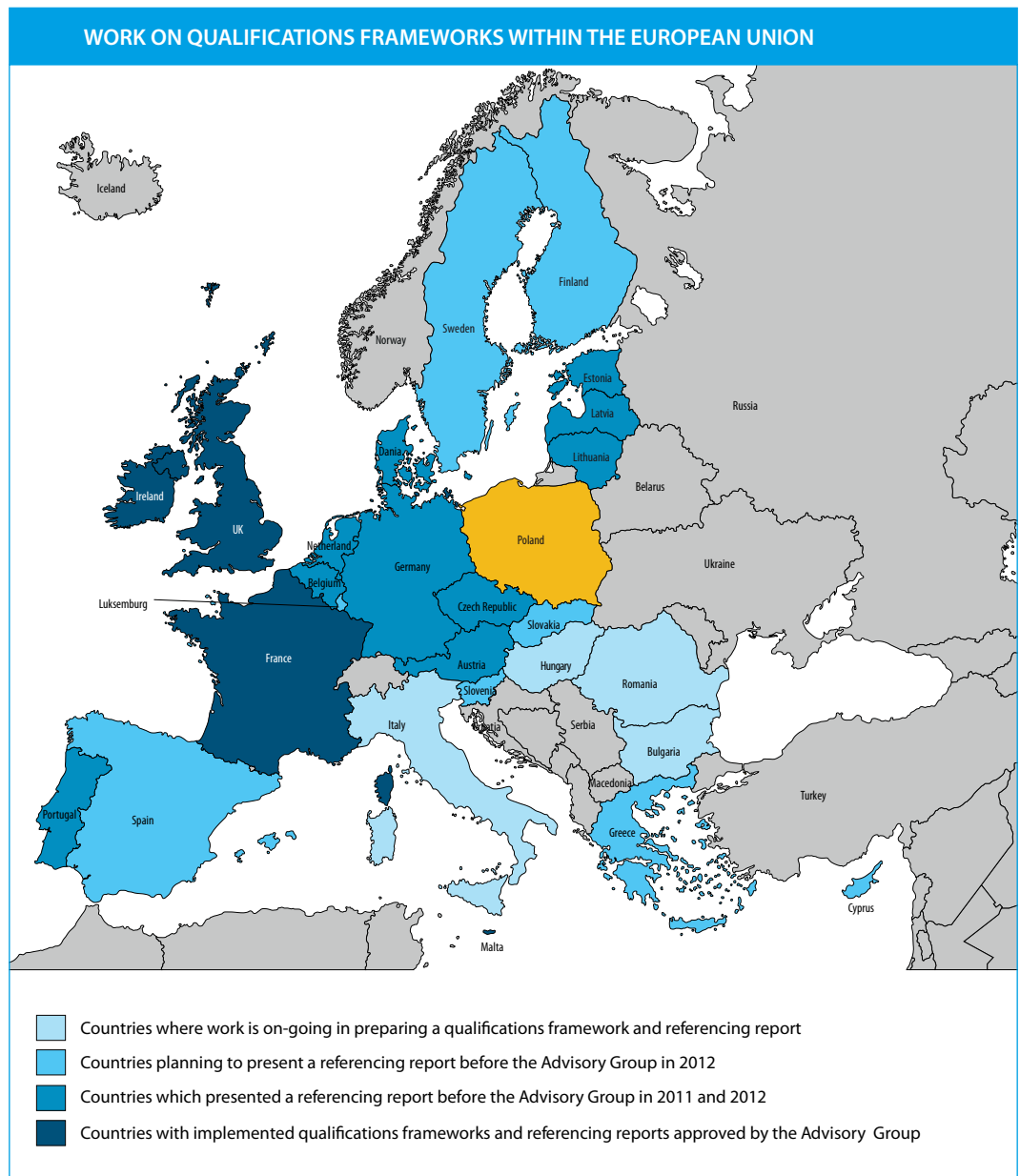


“You may be a highly qualified specialist in a given field but also have knowledge and skills in another, although not necessarily at the same high level. It is important for us to have diplomas or certificates in various areas, creating an individual package or proposal for those looking to make use of our knowledge and skills. This allows us to develop in the way we want to develop.”

Dr. Agnieszka Chłoń-Domińczak,
“European-Style Qualifications” project leader at the ERI.

Seeing the obvious benefit, all European Union member states are voluntarily developing frameworks and referencing reports describing the links between their national frameworks and the European framework – it is essential for the system of qualifications in Europe to be cohesive and comparable. EU member state frameworks already in existence, in the process of being implemented or still at the planning stage differ in the number of qualification levels (e.g. Ireland has 10, while Scotland has 12) and institutions. European countries also have different educational systems. The EQF is a type of “universal translator” for qualification levels and thus also learning outcomes.

All qualifications awarded in European countries, certified through diplomas, certificates or other credentials, will contain information on the level of a given qualification within the national system.



Negotiations on the framework

Poland has been working on preparing and implementing its framework since 2006, aiming to develop a transparent qualifications system and referencing report linking the Polish framework to the European framework.

Since February 2011, the creation of a draft national qualifications system and referencing report has been accompanied by a public debate with representatives of various professional groups and trade unions, employer organisations, industry associations, NGOs, representatives of the education system and government institutions, training companies and Polish and European experts.

The purpose of the debate is to develop specific solutions for the new system. The Polish Qualifications Framework is being developed by the Educational Research Institute under the project “The development of terms of reference for the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework and the National Qualifications Register for lifelong learning”.

Education for the labour market

The Polish economy needs a specialised, creative workforce which is willing to constantly improve its skills and competences. However, despite high unemployment, many employers presently have difficulty in finding such people. On the other hand, Polish jobseekers often have problems finding work corresponding to their qualifications.



The current system of gaining and confirming skills and competences does not encourage learning, personal development or conscious career planning (according to Eurostat labour force surveys, Poland has one of the European Union’s lowest rates of participation in education and training – in Denmark or Sweden, for example, over 20% of adults are engaged in learning, while in Poland this figure is less than 5%). Why? It is not worth it since there is no single, cohesive model for gaining and confirming competences. Qualifications are awarded on the basis of diverse legal regulations by various institutions: schools, regional examination boards, higher education institutions, professional organisations and trade bodies. The principles and procedures for issuing certificates and diplomas vary – it is difficult to juxtapose and compare them against uniform criteria. They count rather as confirmation that

the holder has studied for as long as required by the curriculum of a school or university.

For employers, a diploma in engineering, nursing or IT is not proof of what a given person is capable of or whether they have the skills to make use of their knowledge. In turn, there are many employees active in the labour market who do in fact have vocational skills, but cannot effectively document them because they were gained through various types of courses or training, through e-learning or simply through work experience. There are no institutions or procedures capable of verifying and confirming knowledge and skills gained in these ways, which in practice creates a range of barriers to finding a good job, while also hindering unemployed persons from entering the workforce.

This situation makes it difficult for employers to recruit the specialists they really need. The fact that in Poland vocational training is not well adapted to the changing needs of the labour market does not encourage investment in

“First and foremost, school should develop compound skills, i.e. develop a general predisposition to being able to function in a changing environment. The task of school is also to provide pupils with the ability to efficiently and systematically supplement their knowledge, in some situations independently, in others through finding and taking advantage of appropriate educational solutions.”

Prof. Zbigniew Marciniak,

co-author of the new core curriculum and former deputy minister of science and higher education.

employees. The effectiveness and factual level of training is practically unverified. Employers who today find it difficult to assess employee competences and skills are uncertain about what type of training to provide and what benefits it will bring.

It is necessary to create a new qualifications system which enables competences to be compared, ensures quality and credibility and adapts them to the needs of the labour market. The fundamental core of this system is the Polish Qualifications Framework.

Education for a new qualifications system

The changes currently being made in various fields of education in Poland – from primary school to higher education – are consistent with the qualifications system being developed.

An education system based on learning outcomes means that schools and universities will concentrate on the effectiveness of educational activities. It will be possible to precisely define the educational outcome we want to achieve. Instead of talking about “studying subjects” or “finishing school” we will talk about “learning”.

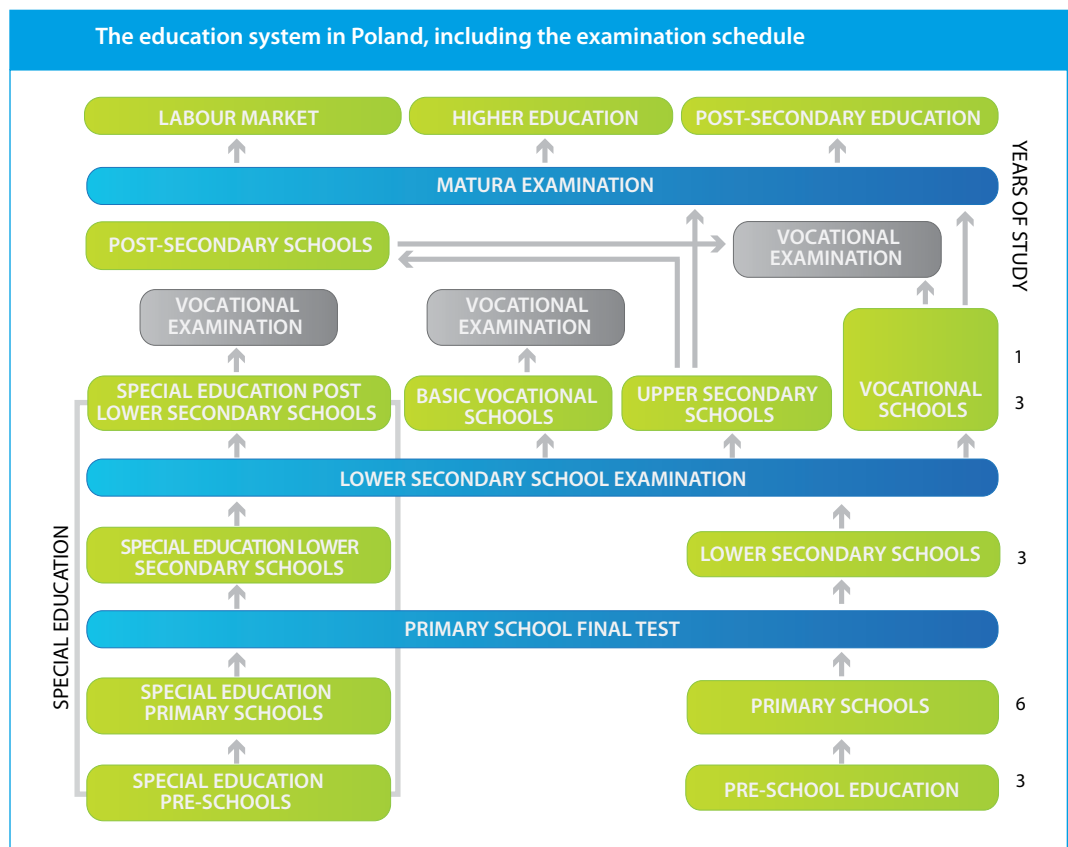
A new curriculum means a better school education

What needs to be done to make Polish schools educate better, match increasing parent and pupil expectations and better prepare for acquiring a profession or university degree and entry into the labour market? In response to these questions, experts have developed and the government is implementing a new core curriculum in schools.

The old curriculum focused on describing the educational process – put simply what happened during classes and the materials to be studied. The new core curriculum specifies what pupils should know and what they should be capable of. It places more emphasis on reaching conclusions and understanding, i.e. the development of compound skills. The momentum has shifted from rote learning to the ability to think and to organise facts.

For the first time education is being treated as a cohesive whole – at lower secondary schools, pupils are required to make use of the knowledge and skills gained at primary school, and the first year of upper secondary school is a direct continuation of lower secondary school.

The amendments were introduced through the Decree of the Minister of National Education of 23 December 2008 on the core curriculum for pre-school child development and general education in specific types of schools (Journal of Laws of 2009, no. 4, item 17). During the 2009-2010 school year, the new core curriculum came into force for the first year of primary school and for lower secondary schools. From the 2012-2013 school year, it will cover up to the fourth year of primary school and upper secondary schools.



The external examination system has also been adapted to the new requirements specified in the core curriculum. The amendments will affect the lower secondary school examination from 2012 and the matura examination from 2015.

More opportunities in higher education

“Those who have completed studies at a given level within the qualifications framework should have a comparable level of knowledge, skills and social competence, irrespective of whether their fields of study are in the humanities or engineering.”

Prof. Ewa Chmielecka, member of the National Team of Bologna Experts, chairperson of the National Qualifications Framework in Higher Education Working Group at the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, expert for the “European-Style Qualifications” project.

As a result of the amendment to the higher education law of March 18, 2011, higher education institutions were given more autonomy to develop curricula as of the 2011-2012 academic year. They are no longer required to refer to a specific list of educational content, i.e. a central list of course names with an allocated framework of educational content that must be included in curricula. Now they are able to independently plan fields of study, taking into consideration the skills and competences a graduate will have upon graduation. Higher education institutions are bound by a universal description of the three highest levels in the national qualifications framework (i.e. doctoral, master’s, licentiate and engineering studies). Furthermore, they have sets of learning outcomes for general fields of study: the humanities, the exact sciences, social, natural sciences, technical, veterinary, medical sciences and the arts. These sets of outcomes are generalised, so that they can be applied in various areas and fields of study. For example, the field of social sciences can include law, sociology or management, while the exact sciences can include mathematics or physics.

A new approach to professions

Gaining new competences – through formal and informal pathways, increasing the opportunity to change professions – is facilitated by modifications to vocational education introduced on September 1, 2012. The foundation for these changes is the Decree of the Minister of National Education of 7 February 2012 on the core curriculum for vocational education. The new classification of professions covers 8 areas, in which 200 professions are distinguished. 251 qualifications are designated within these professions (including 23 professions with three qualifications per profession, 72 with two, 98 with one and 7 professions in the arts for which no qualifications are designated). Some professions were removed, some combined with others and some introduced for the first time. All of these changes are aimed at achieving a modern approach to organising vocational work.

After passing a vocational examination in a given specialisation, the pupil or student receives a certificate. A diploma confirming vocational qualifications is awarded after passing all examinations required for a given profession and after finishing school. It will also be possible to take examinations without being enrolled in school if the pupil has completed lower secondary school education or an eight-year primary school and has worked or studied in a given profession for a minimum of two years. This will streamline the confirmation of competences gained through non-formal education or informal learning.

Another innovation is the introduction of vocational qualification courses, which employers will be able to commission from schools. This means that schools will be teaching what is actually needed in the labour market, increasing competitiveness. Courses will be available not just for pupils, but also for graduates and people who are already in work. It will be possible to link vocational schools with adult vocational education and continuing education centres.

The change in vocational education also creates the possibility to adapt educational requirements to pupils' individual needs and capabilities.

Supplementary upper secondary schools, supplementary technical schools and specialised upper secondary schools will cease to exist. Graduates of vocational post-lower level secondary schools will be able to continue learning at upper secondary schools for adults – a change coordinated with the introduction of the new core curriculum. This better corresponds to growing parent and pupil aspirations, ensures better preparation for vocational education or studies and, as a result, better functioning in the labour market. The primary task of school is to teach pupils how to think, not to recite facts and figures.

Vocational school graduates will not be excluded from further education – they will be able to continue learning at upper secondary schools for adults, starting from the second year.

“Frameworks are particularly necessary in vocational education. This type of education describes learning outcomes in its own language, which is different from the language of general education. I’m not afraid to say that it’s a language better adapted to the requirements of the labour market. In addition, in the case of vocational education, qualifications are gained much more frequently through non-formal and informal education. There is a need to rapidly react to new skills and professions. Thanks to qualifications frameworks, new vocational requirements which are not achievable within a formal system can be quickly taken into consideration.”

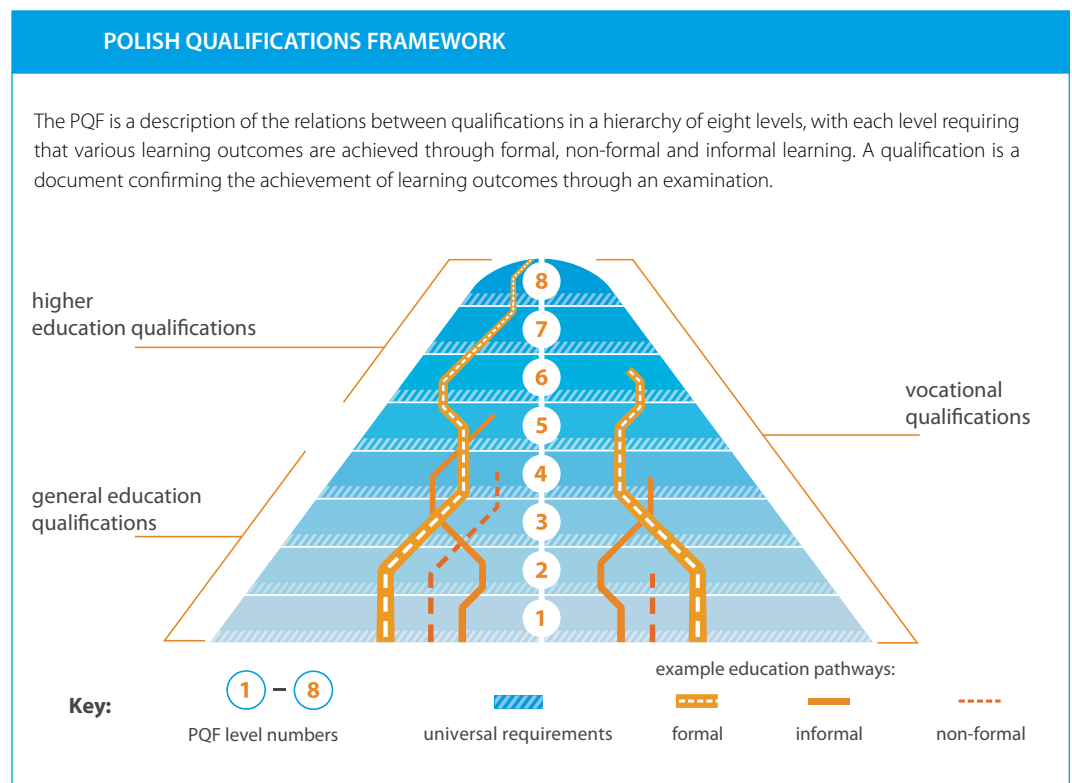
Dr. Tomasz Saryusz-Wolski, member of the National Team of Bologna Experts, expert for the “European-Style Qualifications” project.

Project outcomes

The Polish Qualifications Framework

Like the European Framework, the Polish Qualifications Framework (PQF) has eight qualification levels. The learning outcome requirements for each level are described in three categories: knowledge, skills and social competence.

A full qualification means that a person meets the requirements relating to knowledge, skills and social competence at a given level: both the universal requirements and those specifically assigned to the selected educational pathway of vocational, general (to level four) or higher education (required to gain qualifications at subsequent levels).



A person already holding a qualification at a given level may continue to expand it. Acquiring additional learning outcomes, however, does not necessarily mean a change of level. Put simply, not every learner has to strive towards a doctorate from the outset. What is important is that learners are able to show that they are actually expanding and deepening their skills and knowledge throughout life.

National qualifications register

Since qualifications will be awarded by a wide range of entities operating in different spheres of public life: schools, regional examination boards, crafts chambers, higher education institutions,

“In Europe and around the world, it is a common phenomenon for some of the working population, most frequently migrants, to be employed at levels significantly below their qualifications because potential employers are unable to identify what these people are capable of contributing through their human capital. Because the Polish Qualifications Framework will be referenced to the European Qualifications Framework, a master class craftsman travelling abroad to work will be able to reference the qualifications gained in Poland to similar levels of qualifications in other countries, and determine what the proper rate or salary should be.”

Dr. Agnieszka Chłoń-Domińczak,
“European-Style Qualifications” project leader at the ERI.

employers, industry associations, training institutions, NGOs, etc., it will be necessary to ensure an appropriate level of transparency and credibility in the qualifications awarded, together with unified management of the system. For this reason, a national qualifications register is being developed.

The national register will constitute a publicly accessible, electronic collection of all qualifications issued and registered in Poland. Information from other registers will be collected in one place, but will be open in nature: new qualifications will be entered into the register at the request of the entity or institution wishing to award them. Each qualification entered into the register will be assigned the appropriate level within the Polish Qualifications Framework and thus be referenced to the European Qualifications Framework. After the act on the national qualifications system has entered into force, diplomas and certificates issued by various entities which are not entered into the register will not be recognised as qualifications.

The register will contain information on how to confirm the competences required for a given qualification in the event of skills gained outside of the formal education system – a candidate will therefore be able to find out about the procedures and methods of validation (confirmation of competences, knowledge and skills), validation institutions and the terms and conditions which need to be fulfilled in order to apply for validation.

Another very important function of the register for people wishing to gain or confirm a qualification will be to provide information about the fields in which a given qualification is significant, the types of positions it provides authorisation to work in and, primarily, which learning outcomes need to be confirmed and where this may be done.

The national qualifications register will facilitate mobility within the labour market both for employers and employees by making it easier to assess the usefulness of qualifications. The entry of a qualification into the register will also be a guarantee of its quality. This is of key significance for training companies. Where such systems are in operation, it can be seen that the framework is a means of dialogue between education and the labour market.

What the new qualifications system will change – summary

- **The procedures for assessing and recognising the achievements of learners will be based on learning outcomes,** which specify what a certificate or diploma holder knows, understands and is capable of.
- **Each jobseeker in the open European labour market will be able to hold qualifications which are comprehensible to employers:** at present it is frequently impossible to make a comparison between countries, which hinders Polish workers in the European labour market.
- **A new approach to the learning process:** the education system will encourage lifelong learning.



- **Various learning pathways will be treated equally:** it will cease to be important whether a given qualification has been gained at university, through a training programme or at home. A system for recognising competences gained outside of the formal education system will be created.
- **There will be fundamental change in the vocational training market:** training, which at present is frequently at a low level, will be adapted to the requirements of the labour market, and will support the actual broadening of competences. Specific skills will be required of training coordinators and lecturers, and thus they will also have to adapt to the new system of assessment and verification of competences. Employers will also benefit: they will know whether the expensive employee training they are financing will generate specific benefits for them and for their employees.

The new qualifications system will impact the professional lives of engineers, nurses, IT technicians and plumbers in that they will be able to piece their achievements together from various elements: they will be able to expand their competences and skills gained during studies or at vocational school by competences gained during Polish or European courses or through e-learning, after which they

will obtain an applicable certificate. In order to gain new specialisations, they will not be forced to begin studies in a new field or school with a different vocational profile as is the case today. They will save time and will not have to re-learn material which they have already studied.

This will make it possible to significantly shorten the learning process, which against the backdrop of the rapidly changing challenges of the labour market is of particular significance. It will provide many more options and means of learning to persons who have become unemployed or are at risk of job loss. They will also be able to use the time they spend without work to gain new competences.

“The implementation of qualifications frameworks brings at least two benefits. First is the fact that certificates and diplomas issued in Poland will be comparable internationally. This will facilitate mobility within the European and Polish labour markets.”

Prof. Zbigniew Marciniak, co-author of the new core curriculum and former deputy minister of science and higher education.

Important institutions in Poland

Implementation of qualifications frameworks is supported by projects in various fields of education, particularly those connected with vocational and higher education and the labour market.

Below is a list of the most important institutions, teams, advisory bodies and programmes working on the issue of qualifications frameworks:

■ Ministry of National Education

The Ministry of National Education commissioned the Educational Research Institute to implement the project “The development of terms of reference for the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework and the National Qualifications Register for lifelong learning”. The Minister of National Education is also the chairperson of the Inter-ministerial Team on Lifelong Learning, including the National Qualifications Framework.

The Ministry’s Department of Vocational and Continuing Education is implementing a project entitled “Modernisation of examinations confirming vocational qualifications”. Another interesting initiative is its “Vocational school – a positive choice” programme.



■ Ministry of Science and Higher Education

The Ministry is implementing a project entitled “National qualifications frameworks in higher education as a tool to improve the quality of education”. The objective of this project is to adapt the Polish qualifications framework to European frameworks. Another programme implemented by

the ministry is the “Support of studies on the mutual recognition of accreditation decisions in the European Higher Education Area”. This project aims to develop international cooperation between the Polish higher education system and the European Higher Education Area, including through facilitating education at foreign universities. The goal of both initiatives is to implement qualifications frameworks in higher education.

■ **Ministry of Labour and Social Policy**

Several hundred vocational competences will be developed within the project “Developing a set of national standards of vocational competences required by employers”. The Ministry is also implementing the programme “Improving the professional qualifications of social assistance and integration workers”.

■ **Inter-ministerial Taskforce for Lifelong Learning, including the National Qualifications Framework**

The Inter-ministerial Taskforce for Lifelong Learning, including the National Qualifications Framework, was created pursuant to administrative order no. 13 of the President of the Council of Ministers of 17 February 2010. Chaired by the Minister of National Education, the taskforce is an advisory body to the Prime Minister.

The taskforce’s principle aim is to develop a draft strategic document on solutions for lifelong learning in Poland, including the learning outcomes presented in the National Qualifications Framework, with consideration of the principles constituting European lifelong learning and the European qualifications frameworks.

■ **The Steering Committee for the National Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning**

This is a sub-team working within the Inter-ministerial Taskforce for Lifelong Learning, including the National Qualifications Framework, chaired by the Minister of Science and Higher Education. The committee was created to monitor the process of creating and implementing the National Qualifications Framework.

■ **National Team of Bologna Experts**

This team works on harmonising the higher education system at the European level and adapting the existing qualifications frameworks in Poland to other similar solutions in the EU.

■ **Bureau for Academic Recognition and International Exchange**

This institution serves as the national coordination point for European qualifications frameworks. It is responsible for arranging foreign scholarships for Polish students, among other activities.

■ **National Centre for Supporting Vocational and Continuing Education**

The Centre is implementing a project entitled “Improving curricula – key to modernising vocational training”, whose core objective is to improve the quality of vocational education by modernising and verifying curricula in terms of their adaptation to the requirements of a knowledge-based economy and in accordance with planned curricula-related and organisational changes in vocational training.

■ **Lifelong Learning Programme**

Lifelong Learning is a European Union programme for professional education and development. It is being implemented from 2007 to 2013 and continues the activities previously carried out under the SOCRATES, Leonardo da Vinci, Jean Monnet, e-Learning and European Language Label programmes.

It aims to develop various forms of learning by supporting cooperation between education and training systems in different countries. The Programme works to improve the quality and attractiveness of education and vocational training in Europe.



Passionate about Education

This is a project implemented by the Educational Research Institute from April 2009 to June 2015 to increase the quality of education in Poland.

The project, whose full name is "Quality and effectiveness in education – strengthening institutional research capabilities", comprises almost 50 studies carried out at schools and higher education institutions throughout Poland, with its results being used in educational policy and practice. The ERI studies are aimed at providing a response to questions, such as, how to help underachieving pupils and support high achievers, how to increase the effectiveness of education and how to increase the prestige of the teaching profession. Public debates on education in Poland are also organised as part of the "Passionate about Education" Project.

The project is co-financed by the European Union under the European Social Fund.

The most significant project outcomes are:

- A report on the state of education,
- The results of academic research,
- Databases,
- The eduentuzjasci.pl website

The **Educational Research Institute (ERI)** is an institution conducting interdisciplinary research on the functioning and effectiveness of the education system in Poland. The Institute participates in national and international research projects, prepares reports, expert opinions and carries out advisory functions.

The ERI employs education researchers - sociologists, psychologists, educators, economists, political scientists and representatives of other academic disciplines - eminent specialists in their fields with considerable professional expertise, not only in research but also in teaching, public administration and NGO activities.

The ERI is implementing the following projects: "The development of terms of reference for the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework and the National Qualifications Register for lifelong learning" / "Quality and effectiveness of education – strengthening of institutional research capabilities" / "Development of methodology for assessment of educational added value" / "Nationwide survey – skills of third year pupils".



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