

THE VALIDATION OF LEARNING OUTCOMES IN POLAND

– NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR ATTAINING QUALIFICATIONS



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Table of contents

Preface	5
1. Introduction	7
2. The validation of learning outcomes as defined in the Act on the Integrated Qualifications System.....	11
2.1. General information	11
2.2. Requirements for the validation of learning outcomes.....	12
2.3. Quality assurance of the validation of learning outcomes.....	14
3. The validation of learning outcomes in the context of changes initiated by the IQS Act	17
3.1. The process of the validation of learning outcomes.....	17
3.2. Methods used in the validation of learning outcomes	20
3.3. Validation practitioners	28
3.4. Conditions of performing the validation of learning outcomes	30
4. Example scenarios of the validation of learning outcomes.....	32
Bibliography	37
Annex – The validation of learning outcomes as presented in European Union documents and materials.....	39

Preface

The information about the validation of learning outcomes (hereinafter referred to as validation¹) presented in this publication is primarily intended for awarding bodies² operating as part of the Integrated Qualifications System (IQS) and entities applying for the authority to award qualifications. It was also written for government ministries and external quality assurance institutions, career counsellors and teachers, as well as other persons interested in this issue. This publication was prepared as an aid for individuals involved in planning and performing validation, as well as those developing and assessing the descriptions of qualifications submitted to the IQS.

This publication was produced at the Educational Research Institute as a result of the preparatory work undertaken to implement the IQS conducted in systemic projects³. Among other activities, this work included a review of documents and publications produced in the European Union addressing issues relating to validation. A brief report on the review of these materials is provided in the annex.

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- 1 In the Polish qualifications system, the term “validation” applies to the assessment of learning outcomes attained through formal education as well as non-formal and informal learning.
 - 2 In the Polish qualifications system, to become an awarding body, institutions must gain such authorisation from the minister responsible for the particular field to which the qualification is related (e.g. health related qualifications – the Ministry of Health, social work qualifications – the Ministry of the Family, Labour and Social Policy) through an application process. The IQS Act describes awarding bodies as “certifying institutions”.
 - 3 Between 2010–2015, the Educational Research Institute implemented a project entitled “Development of terms of reference for the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework and the National Qualifications Register for lifelong learning” (NQF Project) to develop the concept and structure of the Integrated Qualifications System. In 2013–2015, a complementary project entitled “Developing the national qualifications system – pilot implementation of the national qualifications system and its promotional campaign” (NQF Pilot Project) was also carried out.

1. Introduction

Changes in the labour market connected with globalisation and the dynamic development of new technologies have resulted in increased expectations of employees, especially in terms of their knowledge and skills, which have become the essential type of capital required for an innovative economy. As a result, individuals must always be ready to learn new things, and even change their profession in order to remain active in the labour market. Some may return to university (e.g. to enrol in a postgraduate study programme), but more often, people take advantage of various training courses. Many skills are also acquired at work and while developing personal interests. The competences gained outside school and university may be quite valued in the labour market, but they are not always properly recognised. This situation neither benefits employees nor employers. Hence the growing importance of the concept of lifelong learning (LLL) and – in consequence – the formal recognition of competences acquired outside school or university.

A major step forward in the new policy for education and the labour market is the adoption of the general principle that the basis for awarding a qualification is the ability of a person to demonstrate that he/she has attained its required learning outcomes. In the context of the new qualifications system, “learning outcomes” are understood as what one knows and understands (knowledge) and what one is able to do (skills) as the result of various types of activities, as well as the capacity to assume specific types of responsibility (social competence). As indicated above, learning outcomes may be attained in various ways: at school (formal education), during courses, training sessions, internships or work placements occurring outside the school system (non-formal education), as part of employment, voluntary work or the development of one’s hobbies and interests (informal learning).

Assessing knowledge and skills has always been an inherent part of formal education, but it was not a general practice in the case of non-formal education. For obvious reasons, formalising the assessment of knowledge and skills, and even more so of social competence, did not occur with informal learning. The exceptions were cases where an opportunity was provided to take examinations on an extramural basis. Adopting the principle that the basis for awarding a qualification is the confirmation of attained learning outcomes, and not the way they are acquired, has opened new opportunities in constructing a more flexible system of gaining qualifications.

In a system of awarding qualifications focussed on learning outcomes, an important role is played by validation – or, in other words, the formalised process

of confirming whether the learning outcomes required for the qualification have been attained. Attaching greater importance to learning outcomes than to the way the learning process is organised makes it possible to clearly identify validation as the final stage of gaining a qualification. In the modernised qualifications system currently being implemented in Poland, validation should be made available regardless of whether organised forms of education and training are used or not. According to the new integrated qualifications system, validation can be extended over time, i.e. there is no need to confirm all the learning outcomes required for a qualification at the same time. Second, validation can take place in various venues, e.g. at the workplace. Third, different methods can be used for assessing the attainment of learning outcomes, appropriate to the needs and limitations of the individual seeking validation. This should lead to greater opportunities for more people who are interested in attaining qualifications to have their learning outcomes assessed and confirmed.

Providing opportunities to have learning outcomes validated according to the principles outlined above is particularly important for:

- working people who wish to change jobs or professions in order to make better use of the competences gained while working or as part of their non-professional activities,
- individuals who are, for various reasons, excluded from the labour market (e.g. as the result of long term unemployment) or who are at risk of exclusion but have attained new learning outcomes relevant for employment opportunities,
- people returning to the labour market after a longer break, during which they attained new competences (e.g. people looking after their children or other family members),
- early leavers from formal education who later wish to obtain an education on an extramural basis,
- people who have attained new competences through involvement in voluntary service or pursuance of their own interests and would like to attain qualifications confirming what they have learned (e.g. in order to be promoted in the organisation where they do voluntary work).

Certificates and other documents confirming the attainment of qualifications should be identifiable and recognised in the relevant community, sector or industry, whether in Poland or abroad.

The introduction of more flexible validation systems has been the subject of analyses and discussions in Europe for several years, in specific member states as well as within various international bodies operating in the European Union. A certain stage of such discussions culminated in the 2012 Recommendation of the Council of the European Union on the validation of non-formal and informal learning. The recommendation urges member states to implement solutions allowing competences gained outside school or university to be recognised in their national qualifications systems. The annex provides more information about the European context of the changes in validation being implemented in Poland.

2. The validation of learning outcomes as defined in the Act on the Integrated Qualifications System

2.1. General information

In 2008, the Recommendation on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning was published (European Parliament and the Council, 2008), whereby EU member states were advised to reference their national qualifications framework to the European Qualifications Framework. Poland, like other member states, has taken steps to implement this recommendation. As a result of these activities, Poland's parliament adopted the Act on the Integrated Qualifications System (Polish Official Journal 2016.64) in December 2015.

According to Article 4 of the Act, the Integrated Qualifications System (IQS) is to ensure:

- 1) the quality of awarded qualifications,
- 2) the possibility of having learning outcomes recognised, which were attained through non-formal and informal education,
- 3) the possibility of accumulating credits and having them recognised in stages,
- 4) access to information about the qualifications that are awarded in the Republic of Poland,
- 5) the ability to compare qualifications awarded in the Republic of Poland with those available in other European Union member states.

Implementation of the IQS is intended to facilitate the ability of all people to gain qualifications as conveniently as possible, in different places and at different times. One of the prerequisites of this is to properly design validation, providing opportunities to confirm the learning outcomes attained in any way possible – while learning at school or university, taking courses or by oneself.

The Act specifies, among other things, the principles of validation and certification with regard to the qualifications included in the IQS that are awarded outside the education system. In the case of qualifications awarded in the formal

general, vocational and higher education systems, the principles of validation and certification are defined by relevant legislation and this did not change with the adoption of the IQS Act.

The act defines validation as *confirming whether an individual seeking to have a specific qualification awarded, regardless of the method used by that individual to learn, has attained a part or all of the learning outcomes required for said qualification* (Article 2.22). According to the cited definition, the assessment and confirmation of learning outcomes can occur independently of the way they were attained (education). This way, the possibility of attaining learning outcomes through non-formal education and informal learning is ensured in Poland.

Certification is defined in the Act as: *the process whereby an individual seeking to have a specific qualification awarded receives a document confirming the awarding of that qualification from an awarding body after having achieved a positive result of validation* (Article 2.1). Certification was defined as a distinct concept in the IQS because in some cases (e.g. obtaining a driver's licence), separate institutions are responsible for validation and certification. The authorisation to certify a given market qualification existing in the IQS is granted by the relevant minister under an administrative decision. Every institution which has been granted certification authority has a degree of discretion in planning and performing validation and certification. As a result, it can implement its proprietary solutions in this area and consistently improve them. Awarding bodies are directly responsible for validation and certification. This is also the case when an awarding body authorises another entity to validate learning outcomes.

2.2. Requirements for the validation of learning outcomes

The certification authority for a specific qualification can be obtained by any commercial entity meeting the criteria stated in the Act, including, among other things, ensuring the organisational and staffing conditions required to properly conduct validation (Article 41). The requirements concerning validation result from the nature of the learning outcomes which need to be attained in order to be awarded the qualification.

The descriptions of qualifications awarded outside the school system present the characteristics of the qualification, including the learning outcomes defined for the given qualification and their assessment criteria (Articles 25 and 38). The description of each qualification⁴ included in the IQS and awarded outside the formal general, vocational and higher education systems must also present the

⁴ More about the description of qualifications in: Ziewiec-Skokowska, Danowska-Florczyk, Stęchły (2016).

requirements for validation. Such requirements serve as the basis for the proper planning, preparation and performance of validation at each awarding body.

Compliance with these requirements by various institutions awarding the same qualification is aimed at ensuring the reliability and comparability of validation results. Depending on the scope and degree of complexity of the qualification, the requirements can be defined at different levels of detail, but they should not form an exhaustive description of the validation procedure. Each awarding body develops and follows its own validation scenarios, taking these requirements into account.

Validation requirements may be specified for the whole qualification or separately for each set of learning outcomes as needed. Validation requirements can also be supplemented with guidelines for the entities which plan, prepare and perform validation.

The experience gathered during the projects which prepared the conceptual framework for the IQS Act suggests that, to the extent they are needed, validation requirements should relate to:

- the validation methods used,
- the human resources – the competences of the individuals performing validation,
- the way validation is performed as well as the organisational and material conditions necessary for the proper performance of validation (e.g. its time frames, the technical and on-site conditions).

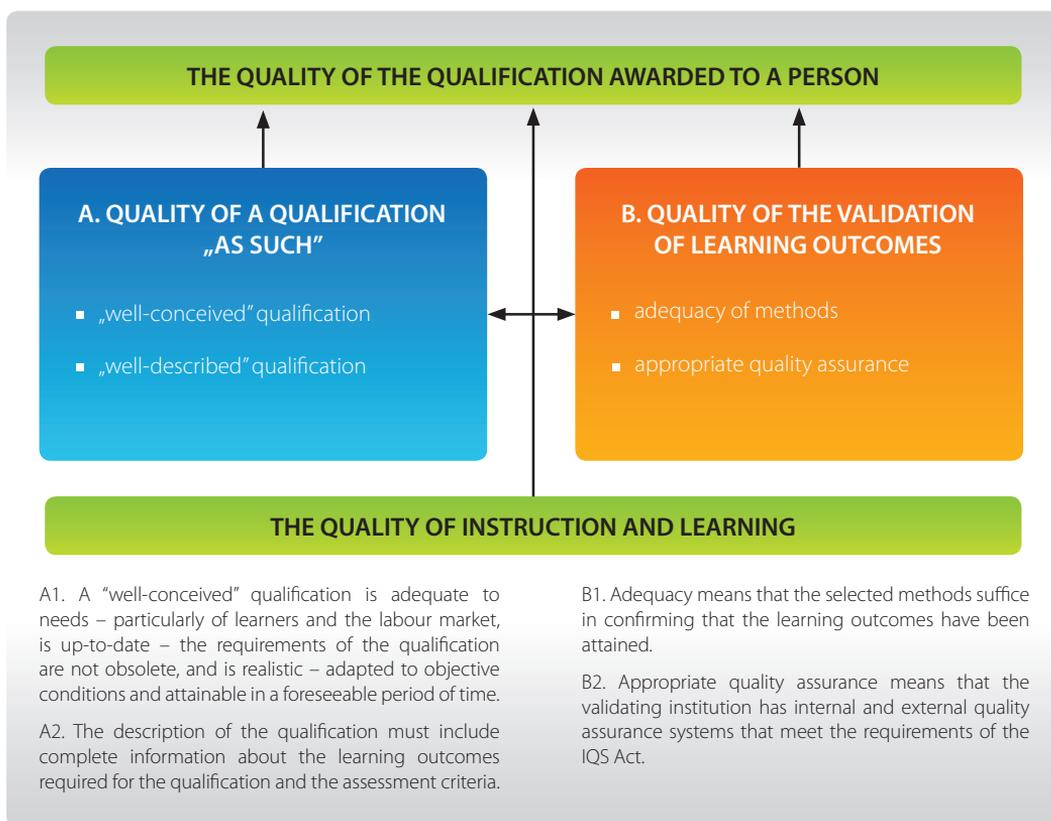
Furthermore, validation requirements can also pertain to other matters, e.g. specifying the conditions for appealing the validation outcome, the rules and conditions for re-doing validation, etc.

It is worth pointing out that the validation requirements in the description of the qualification should only include those conditions, which, if not satisfied, would make the validation outcome completely unreliable.

2.3. Quality assurance of the validation of learning outcomes

Many procedures set forth in the IQS Act are intended to ensure the quality of qualifications. After the discussions among experts and stakeholder public debate meetings, it was acknowledged that three main groups of factors determine the quality of a qualification awarded to a person. These are: the quality of the qualification “as such”, the quality of the validation process and the quality of instruction and learning. These dependencies are illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. What does the quality of a qualification awarded to a person depend on?



Source: IBE.

The quality of validation, i.e. reliability of its results, can be said to exist if:

- the exact learning outcomes which were supposed to be assessed are indeed assessed,
- the result of assessment is independent of the place, time, methods used and individuals performing validation.

Thus, the quality of validation depends on aligning its process, the methods used and the conditions in which it is performed to the specific nature of the qualification. Validation must also be aligned with the method used by the individual to attain the learning outcomes. Thus, the quality of validation means that the results of validation performed by different awarding bodies are comparable.

According to the IQS Act, the validation and certification carried out in awarding bodies must be quality assured by internal and external quality assurance systems (Article 50). The internal quality assurance system is established by the awarding body itself. Quality assurance relates to the rules of conduct, procedures, methods and organisational solutions serving to ensure the propriety of validation and certification, as well as their improvement (Article 63). Internal quality assurance systems include:

- the proper separation of the learning process from validation (e.g. the instructor does not participate in assessment),
- continuous monitoring and regular evaluation of activities relating to validation and certification,
- periodic internal evaluation of validation and certification.

External quality assurance is performed by institutions appointed by the relevant ministers for the qualification⁵. These institutions conduct specified tasks in relation to the awarding bodies and include:

- monitoring the internal quality assurance system of the awarding body,
- monitoring compliance of the awarding body with the requirements for the organisational and staffing conditions enabling validation to be performed according to the requirements presented in the description of the qualification,

⁵ Called external quality assurance entities in the IQF Act.

- performance of periodic external evaluations of the validation and certification processes of a given awarding body and the operation of its internal quality assurance system (Article 66).

The IQS Act states that the quality assurance of qualifications cannot be an ad hoc activity, but must be an integral component of the awarding body's management system. The quality assurance of qualifications is intended to ensure the reliability of the qualification and improvement of its validation. This is not administrative supervision, but in specific cases, the results of external evaluation may lead to revoking certification authority (e.g. if qualifications are awarded to individuals who have not successfully passed validation; see Article 80).

3. The validation of learning outcomes in the context of changes initiated by the IQS Act

3.1. The process of the validation of learning outcomes

The definition of validation in the IQS Act provides new possibilities for assessing and confirming whether an individual has achieved the learning outcomes required for a qualification. This generates new tasks for national policies on education, qualifications and career counselling. Both institutions and participants should have access to information and counselling at every stage of validation relating to, among other things:

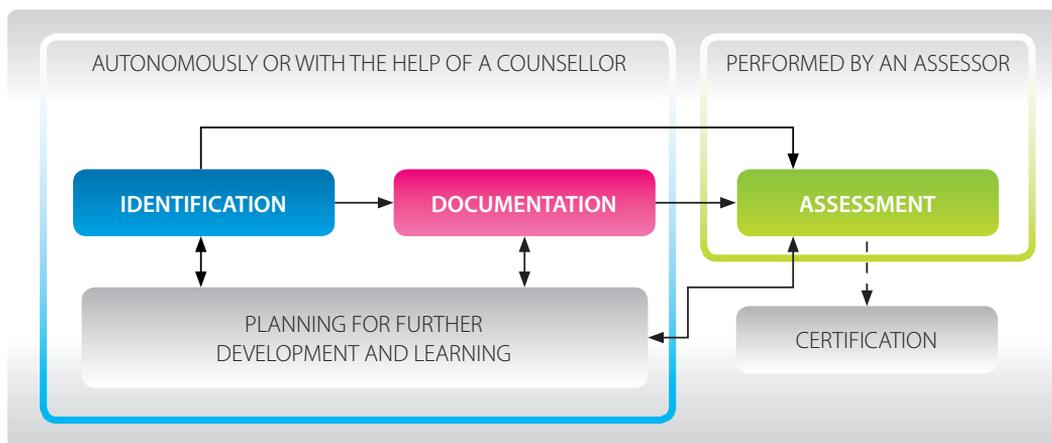
- the qualifications which can be gained,
- the conditions of undergoing the validation process for the desired qualification,
- schedule, costs, procedures and methods used, etc. in the validation process for the desired qualification,
- available forms of support (Cedefop, 2015).

The times when qualifications were awarded solely on the condition of participating in a specific training course are about to end. The general principle in the IQS Act is the performance of reliable validation, whose positive result is sufficient to have a qualification awarded or a set of learning outcomes confirmed.

According to the IQS Act, a qualification may be awarded to individuals who have not completed a learning programme, but have attained the learning outcomes required for the qualification in other ways, such as through non-formal education or informal learning. In this case, the assessment process should be accompanied, if necessary, by support in the form of counselling aimed at diagnosing the attained competences and collecting evidence that they have indeed been achieved.

Considering the above, validation should be considered a multi-stage process consisting of the identification, documentation and assessment of learning outcomes. These stages are illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Simplified scheme of the validation of learning outcomes



Source: IBE.

An overview of each validation stage is provided in Table 1 and a detailed diagram is presented in Figure 3.

Table 1. Stages of the validation of learning outcomes

Stage	Description of the Stage	Results of the Stage	Possible further steps
IDENTIFICATION	<p>Identification and analysis of attained knowledge, skills and competences.</p> <p>May be performed autonomously by the person undergoing validation or with the help of a validation counsellor.</p>	<p>Review of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Possessed learning outcomes which have been formally confirmed* ▪ Attained learning outcomes which can be confirmed, ▪ Competence gaps which may be worthwhile to fill or should be filled. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Work on a personal development plan; initiate learning. ▪ Document selected learning outcomes or, if possible, have them immediately assessed.

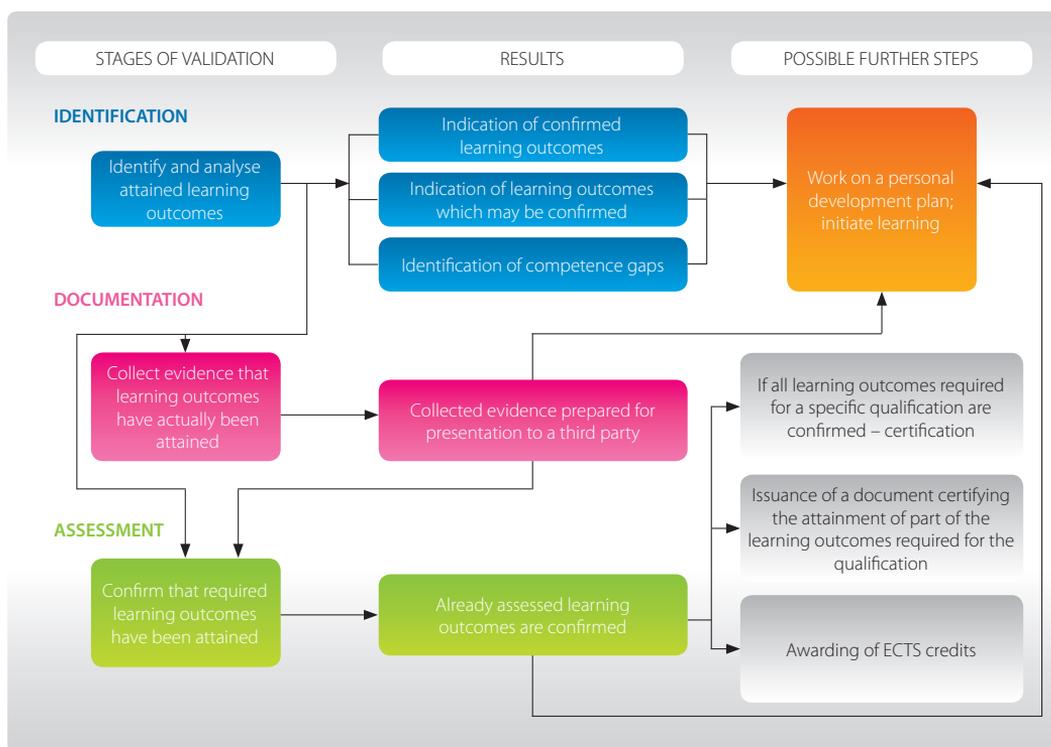
* The Act on the IQS describes confirmed learning outcomes as “credits” (Art. 48).

Stage	Description of the Stage	Results of the Stage	Possible further steps
DOCUMENTATION	<p>Collect evidence attesting to the attainment of selected learning outcomes (e.g. certificates, certificates of completed internships, work samples, video recordings, recommendations, description of work performed, etc.).</p> <p>May be performed autonomously by the person undergoing validation or with the help of a validation counsellor.</p>	<p>Collected evidence is prepared for presentation to a third party.</p> <p><i>Comment:</i></p> <p><i>Such evidence collected in one place in paper or electronic form is often called a "portfolio".</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Work on a personal development plan; initiate learning. ▪ Undergo assessment.
ASSESSMENT	<p>Using appropriate methods, confirm that the specific learning outcomes have been attained.</p> <p>In validating for the awarding of a specific qualification – compare validation results with the learning outcomes required for the qualification.</p>	<p>Confirmation of the assessed learning outcomes.</p> <p><i>Comment:</i></p> <p><i>The person undergoing the validation process should receive feedback about the learning outcomes which have not been confirmed and the justification for such a decision.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Certification. ▪ Issuance of a document certifying the attainment of only those learning outcomes that were confirmed. ▪ Awarding of ECTS or ECVET credits**. ▪ Work on a personal development plan; initiate learning.

Source: IBE.

** European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training.

Figure 3. Diagram of the validation of learning outcomes



Source: IBE.

3.2. Methods used in the validation of learning outcomes

The term “validation” is most often associated with examination. Yet, the previous chapter suggests that equating validation with examination would excessively narrow the term – validation is now understood more broadly in Europe. School and university teachers have different methods of assessing knowledge. Similarly, various methods may be used in the validation of learning outcomes attained outside the formal education system, making it possible to identify, document and assess learning outcomes.

3.2.1. Brief description of the methods used in the validation of learning outcomes

In European practice, the basic methods used in validation are: tests, interviews, debates, presentations, observations, simulations, a review of statements made by the person undergoing validation and an analysis of the evidence provided. Each method has its own strengths and weaknesses, which should be taken into account when developing and performing validation.

Tests

Tests with closed- or open-ended questions are an established and trusted method of assessing learning outcomes relating to knowledge.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tests are universally known and perceived as an objective examination method. ▪ Tests are relatively inexpensive and easy to administer. ▪ Test results are easy to reference to external standards. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tests might discourage individuals with negative experiences from formal education and people with low reading and writing proficiency. ▪ They are not useful in assessing practical skills and social competences.

Interviews, debates, presentations

These are most often conducted in order to specify and broaden the information gathered (e.g. from documents submitted by the person undergoing validation).

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Interviews, debates and presentations make it possible to adapt the validation procedure to the specific person undergoing validation. ▪ The learning outcomes of the person undergoing validation can be identified more exactly. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The results achieved through interviews, debates and presentations depend to a large extent on the communication style and subjective assessments of the individuals performing validation. ▪ The results may also depend on the individual traits of the person undergoing validation.

Observation

Observations enable the assessment of specific learning outcomes on the basis of the way the person undergoing validation performs certain actions (most often in the work place).

Strengths

- Observation makes it possible to assess learning outcomes which are difficult to confirm by other methods.
- Observation makes it possible to obtain a high degree of reliability of validation results.
- Observation makes it possible to assess several learning outcomes at the same time.
- Observation makes it possible to assess learning outcomes without the stress generated by placing a person undergoing validation in an artificial situation.

Weaknesses

- The results of validation obtained through observation may be considerably affected by various circumstances relating to the location in which it is taking place.
- The method is relatively time-consuming.

Simulation

Simulation is when the person undergoing validation demonstrates that the learning outcomes have been attained in the course of performing specific tasks under conditions imitating actual situations. Simulation is used if it is impossible to perform an observation in natural circumstances, e.g. when testing a pilot's reaction to severe weather conditions or a technical failure of the airplane during flight.

Strengths

- As with observation, simulation makes it possible to obtain a high degree of reliability of the validation results.
- Simulation makes it possible to assess the ability to cope in unusual/crisis situations.

Weaknesses

- Simulation is often very costly because it requires special, usually sophisticated equipment.
- It is difficult to prepare a simulation properly and it requires a large amount of work.

Reviewing the statement of a person undergoing validation

A person's own statement that he/she has attained the specific learning outcomes can never be the only basis for a positive validation result. However, it may be taken into account, especially when it is certified by third parties. Wherever possible, such declarations should be supported with evidence. Declarations of the attainment of learning outcomes are included in some documents, e.g. competence books, CVs, Europass documents.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A person's statements on personal achievements may facilitate the validation process by better adapting it to their needs. ▪ Statements on one's knowledge, skills and social competences may contribute to a deeper self-reflection by the person undergoing validation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Many persons' own assessments of their achievements presented at the start of the validation process may be rather unreliable.

Analysis of evidence

Any evidence of having attained learning outcomes supplied by the person undergoing validation is analysed. The evidence is gathered and prepared either solely by the person undergoing validation or with the help of a validation counsellor. The gathered evidence is usually presented in a portfolio, a personal competence book or similar format.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The evidence provided by the person undergoing validation may be very useful at the stages of identification and documentation, as well as at the stage of assessment. ▪ The analysis of specific evidence makes a relatively reliable assessment possible of whether the individual has attained the learning outcomes. ▪ Analysing evidence is relatively inexpensive. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The analysis of evidence usually requires follow-up, e.g. an interview with the person undergoing validation. ▪ The preparation of evidence takes time, which may discourage persons undergoing validation. ▪ The aim of validation is to gain a qualification and in order to collect sufficient evidence, the person undergoing validation must be very familiar with the description of the qualification or request the help of a validation counsellor.

3.2.2. Skills audit and portfolio

The Council recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (Council of the European Union, 2012) urges member states to enable unemployed persons and those at risk of unemployment to have their learning outcomes identified (“skills audit”).

One of the ways to identify a person’s learning outcomes is to conduct an “analysis of knowledge, skills and competences of individuals, including their aptitudes and motivations to define a career project and/or plan professional reorientation or a training project” (European Commission, 2014a, p. 241). The performance of a skills audit may thus be treated as part of the validation process.

In practice, the approach to the skills audit differs from country to country. For example in France, the skills audit (Fr. *bilan de compétences*) is performed by a practitioner according to a precisely defined scheme. The United Kingdom is aiming to develop tools (often available online) which would enable a person to identify the learning outcomes autonomously without the help of a validation counsellor.

During the work on the Integrated Qualifications System in Poland, the concept of a tool was developed to enable the identification of attained learning outcomes (including those attained outside formal education) and also any competence gaps. This is intended primarily as a tool for career counsellors and human resource managers⁶.

The term “portfolio” may have various meanings. In a school context, a “portfolio” means a folder of work produced by a pupil. In the context of validation, a “portfolio” may mean a method of identifying and documenting one’s competences (Souto Otero, 2010) or the presentation of evidence of having attained certain learning outcomes.

A portfolio may be produced and used in various ways. In Estonia, the portfolio is prepared on the basis of the STARR interview technique⁷. In Flanders, the Netherlands and France, the portfolio (known as dossier) is a set of documents serving as evidence that an individual has attained specific learning outcomes.

⁶ Article available at <http://www.kwalifikacje.edu.pl/pl/publikacje/971-metoda-bilansu-kompetencji>.

⁷ STARR (*Situation, Task, Action, Result, Reflection*) is a technique used, e.g., during job interviews, making it possible to identify a candidate’s competences and determine whether they match the tasks performed in the job position on offer.

3.2.3. Selection of the methods used in the validation of learning outcomes

The methods listed above may be used for all qualifications – whether achieved in formal education or outside it. While designing the validation process, it is worth considering the use of several methods. The use of diversified methods in validation is becoming increasingly more widespread in Europe (Cedefop, 2015). Among other things, a number of mutually complementary methods are used in one procedure. Also gaining popularity is the combination of analysing the evidence included in a portfolio and an interview, followed up by a review of the statements made by the person undergoing validation about the learning outcomes attained. It is recommended that different methods be used for the same qualification, for example, depending on whether validation is performed as part of formal education or during on-the-job training.

The methods of validating learning outcomes may be used to a greater or lesser extent at all stages of the process: identification, documentation and assessment. For example, an interview may be useful at each stage, whereas simulation is mainly suitable in the assessment stage. The designers of the validation process of a specific qualification should decide which methods will be appropriate for the particular case.

Table 2 presents the methods used in validation which have been assessed by stakeholders from EU member states.

Table 2. Usefulness of the various methods used in validation

	IDENTIFICATION	DOCUMENTATION	ASSESSMENT
TEST	1	2	3
INTERVIEW	2	1	3
DEBATE	3	1	2
PRESENTATION	1	2	3
OBSERVATION	2	1	3
SIMULATION	1	2	3
REVIEW OF STATEMENTS	3	2	1
ANALYSIS OF EVIDENCE	1	2	3

3 – method is most often regarded as appropriate for the given stage of validation

2 – method is less often regarded as appropriate for the given stage of validation

1 – method is least often regarded as appropriate for the given stage of validation

Source: IBE, based on the European Commission et al. (2014b).

The selection of appropriate methods in the validation process depends on several factors, such as:

- the aim of the activities planned in validation (identification, documentation, assessment of learning outcomes),
- the specific nature of the given qualification,
- the scope and nature of the learning outcomes to be validated.

The choice of methods is also determined by the use of specific tools (e.g. a specific test version, a database of questions, a set of practical tasks, etc.).

3.2.4. Requirements concerning the methods used in the validation of learning outcomes included in the description of the qualification

The requirements concerning the methods used in validation should be defined in as general terms as possible in the descriptions of qualifications included in the IQS that are awarded outside the formal general, vocational and higher education systems. The descriptions of the qualifications do not present any specific validation methods or tools. Only in reasonably justified cases can the requirements regarding validation methods be more specific and indicate the particular methods to be used. Several alternative methods (e.g. observation at the work place or simulation) may also be permitted.

The description of the qualification can also include requirements for the documentation of learning outcomes. This may be, for example, information on the types of acceptable evidence and the criteria which must be satisfied by the evidence in order for it to be recognised in the course of validation. One such criterion may be, for instance, the date a given type of certificate was issued.

In determining the requirements of the validation methods to be used, various types of limitations should be taken into account of the individuals who might be interested in being awarded the qualification. Especially important are the requirements for the methods used at the assessment stage. Validation requirements should not generate an unjustified barrier to accessing qualifications by individuals who have attained the requisite knowledge, skills and social competences through informal learning. To the extent possible, one should take into account the fact that the learning outcomes achieved this way are often more difficult to assess by traditional methods, such as external examinations in formal education.

3.3. Validation practitioners

Throughout the validation process, important tasks are performed by specialists who play different roles. They include, among others:

- validation counsellors, whose role is to support persons undergoing validation at all stages of the process,
- validation assessors, who assess the learning outcomes of the persons undergoing validation.

During the work of developing the conceptual framework and proposed solutions for the Integrated Qualifications System, the experiences of counsellors and specialists in assessing persons undergoing validation were also collected and analysed. On this basis, proposals for the competence profiles of a validation counsellor and validation assessor were developed.

Box 1. Competence profile of a validation counsellor

A validation counsellor shall:

- understand the goals of validation,
- be knowledgeable about validation,
- be knowledgeable about education and awarding bodies as well as labour market institutions and the services they offer, be able to retrieve new information,
- be able to use methods and tools to identify and document competences,
- know the principles of confirming evidence of the attainment of learning outcomes,
- be able to work with others – be open-minded, unbiased, be an active listener, a communicator and know how to motivate people,
- observe high standards of the professional ethics,
- have professional experience in the sector represented by the qualifications that will be the focus of the counselling work,
- know the required learning outcomes and their assessment criteria for the qualifications that will be the focus of the counselling work,
- be knowledgeable about the methods and tools used to assess the required learning outcomes, as well as the criteria for the assessment of the formal aspects and content of the evidence certifying the attainment of the learning outcomes required for the qualifications that are the focus of the counselling work.

Source: IBE.

A validation counsellor with such a background will be able to effectively support persons undergoing validation. After additional training, a counsellor will also be able to successfully perform the duties of a validation assessor. It should be noted, however, that the learning outcomes of a person working with a validation counsellor cannot be assessed by that same counsellor also acting as a validation assessor.

Box 2. Competence profile of a validation assessor

A validation assessor shall:

- understand the goals of validation,
- be knowledgeable about validation,
- know the principles of assessing the evidence of the attainment of learning outcomes,
- be able to use validation methods and tools,
- be experienced in the assessment of learning outcomes,
- be communicative,
- observe high standards of the professional ethics, in particular, remain absolutely impartial during assessments,
- have professional experience in the sector represented by the qualifications that will be the focus of assessment,
- have detailed knowledge of the validation of the learning outcomes required for the qualifications that will be the focus of assessment,
- know the required learning outcomes and the assessment criteria of the qualifications that will be the focus of assessment,
- be knowledgeable about the methods and tools used to assess the required learning outcomes, as well as the criteria of the assessment of the formal aspects and content of the evidence certifying the attainment of the learning outcomes required for the qualifications that are the focus of the assessment.

Source: IBE.

The persons designing the validation scenarios for the required learning outcomes of different qualifications and the tools of assessing them must have similar backgrounds.

The requirements of validation contained in the description of the qualifications relating to the persons involved may include different information concerning, among other things:

- the functions of the persons participating in the validation process, especially the roles of the validation counsellor and validation assessor,
- the competence requirements and possibly formal requirements,
- the guidelines of selecting validation practitioners, including the conditions under which a person is excluded from undertaking a specific role (e.g. being related to the person undergoing validation),
- the methods of assessing and evaluating the competences of validation practitioners,
- information on updates or improvements to the competences of validation practitioners.

3.4. Conditions of performing the validation of learning outcomes

The proper performance of validation requires not only:

- preparing an appropriate validation scenario,
- selecting the proper methods and tools, and
- commissioning validation to persons with the requisite competences.

It is also essential to ensure that the validation process is appropriately organised and is performed in the proper facilities and with the required technical equipment.

Some qualifications have very demanding requirements of the conditions in which validation is performed, and thus difficult to satisfy. For example, a very large lot may be needed to confirm the ability to manoeuvre heavy vehicles. Arranging the assessment of some skills may depend on unobstructed access to a large body of water. Others may require a properly equipped workshop. Identifying and assessing numerous skills requires the availability of special

equipment, including, among other things, sophisticated simulators. This means that some qualifications can only be awarded by few awarding bodies.

The validation requirements enumerated in the descriptions of qualifications on organisational and material arrangements should only include the essential requirements, whose absence would result in a questionable validation outcome.

4. Example scenarios of the validation of learning outcomes

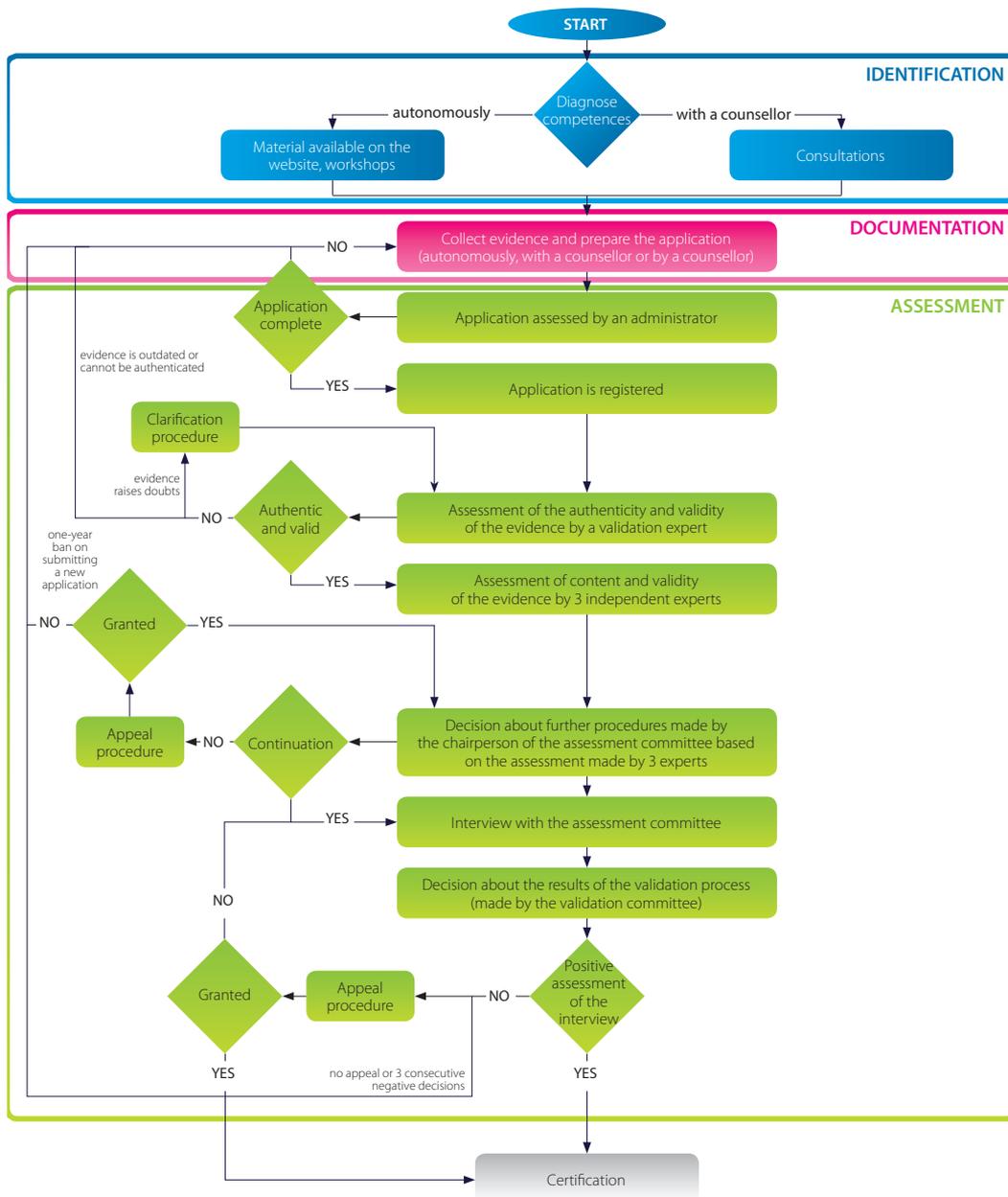
The example scenarios of the validation of learning outcomes presented in this chapter were developed during the NQF Pilot Project conducted by the Educational Research Institute, in cooperation with the Regional Employment Agency in Krakow in 2013–2015. During this work, descriptions of validation and teaching syllabuses for the qualifications of *Master Class Volleyball Coach* and *Planning and Delivery of Leisure Time Animation* were drafted.

Presented below are flow charts of the validation procedure for the qualifications *Master Class Volleyball Coach* (Figure 4) and *Planning and Delivery of Leisure Time Animation* (Figure 5).

The qualifications originate from different sectors, differ in their specificity and PQF level⁸. The descriptions of the validation procedure for each of them were prepared by different entities. As a result, in spite of the inclusion of the same components, the validation scenarios differ.

⁸ The qualification *Planning and Delivery of Leisure Time Animation* was tentatively assigned PQF level 4, whereas the *Master Class Volleyball Coach* qualification – PQF level 7.

Figure 5. Validation flow chart of the qualification *Master Class Volleyball Coach*



Source: Developed by IBE based on the description of validation of the qualification “Master Class Volleyball Coach” designed in 2015 by Anna Szumilewicz, Leszek Piasecki, Ryszard Kowalski, Justyna Kołodziej, Katarzyna Piórkowska representing TZ TKKF.

The validation flow charts presented have a number of common features, even though they were designed for two different qualifications. Both consist of three stages of validation and allow learning outcomes to be confirmed on the basis of evidence gathered by the learner at the documentation stage. The identification and documentation stages in both cases may be performed autonomously by the person undergoing validation or with the help of a validation counsellor. The formal aspects and content of the evidence must be assessed at the assessment stage. Both processes also end in a clear decision summarising the assessment, which then serves as the basis for certification.

Although the term “portfolio” was used only in the case of the *Planning and Delivery of Leisure Time Animation* qualification, one could assume that the “application” included in the validation for the *Master Class Volleyball Coach* qualification is also a certain type of portfolio.

The greatest apparent difference between the two validation flow charts is the process of the assessment stage. In the *Planning and Delivery of Leisure Time Animation* qualification, the evidence gathered by the learner in the portfolio makes it possible to exempt him/her from two tasks (first aid and a task done with a group), while the remaining ones are required of all participants in the process.

The validation of the *Master Class Volleyball Coach* qualification completely relies on evidence gathered by the learner. Therefore, the assessment stage consists of: 1) an assessment of the documentation in terms of its formal aspects and content and 2) a verification interview, making it possible to dispel doubts, if any, relating to the presented evidence. This does not mean, however, that such a validation takes less time (as may be suggested by the flow chart).

With qualifications assigned higher PQF levels, analysing the evidence gathered in a portfolio – especially if such evidence is to be the main basis for assessing the learning outcomes – is a complex process. This type of analysis usually takes time and requires validation assessors to have advanced competences. At the same time, the possibility of attaining a qualification based on a portfolio may encourage many persons who have acquired the necessary knowledge and skills through informal learning to seek the qualification.

The validation flow charts presented above also illustrate different approaches to the appeal procedure. Validation of the *Master Class Volleyball Coach* qualification has more complex procedures, which enable a learner to provide explanations or appeal decisions of the validation assessors in three situations. Such flexibility at the assessment stage treats learners more like active and informed partners

than participants who are expected to passively undergo the validation process. On the other hand, the other validation flow chart (for the *Planning and Delivery of Leisure Time Animation* qualification), allows persons to lodge an appeal twice during the assessment stage, but the final decision of the assessors cannot be appealed. In the event of failing validation, learners can take some comfort in knowing that they only have to reconfirm those segments of validation which were unsuccessful without having to repeat the entire process.

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Annex – The validation of learning outcomes as presented in European Union documents and materials

Introduction

Issues relating to the formal assessment of knowledge, skills and competences attained through non-formal and informal learning have been addressed numerous times by various European bodies and institutions.

The importance of validation is emphasised in numerous European Union documents on lifelong learning. The subject of validation is also present in documents and actions relating to the development of higher education (the Bologna Process), vocational education and training (among other things, the Copenhagen Process) and in initiatives for the activation of youth. These measures transcend and complement one another and contribute to the achievement of the goals of EU strategies, such as the Lisbon Strategy, “Europe 2020” or “Education and Training 2020”.

Validation understood as the assessment and official confirmation of an individual’s attainment of expected knowledge, skills and competences has always been and still is an integral part of the training process in formal education, but this issue is beyond the scope of this text. Its aim is rather to present the evolution of the thinking (over the past 16 years) at the European level about the validation of learning outcomes achieved outside formal education.

Interest in the issue of the validation of learning outcomes achieved outside formal education in the European Union

1. Introducing the approach based on learning outcomes and validation

The fact that EU policies place such great emphasis on developing the validation of learning outcomes attained outside formal education relates to a paradigm shift in learning underway since the end of the 1990s. It consists of shifting the focus in educational policy from the learning process to its results – learning outcomes.

The approach to education, wherein learning outcomes have become the main reference point, makes it possible to diversify the ways of gaining knowledge

and skills and, in consequence, also qualifications. In this way, the status of non-formal education and informal learning was upgraded. This new way of thinking about education is an integral part of numerous initiatives and the basis for developing instruments of European Union policies for education and lifelong learning⁹.

Placing learning outcomes at the focal point has given validation a new, augmented role¹⁰. Validation began to be regarded as a separate process from the implemented education programmes to confirm whether specific competences have been attained regardless of the way they were learned. Validation understood in this way not only makes it possible to confirm competences to gain a qualification, but also to achieve personal development goals. This was noted in various areas relating to learning.

2. Validation in European Union documents and actions

The topic of validating learning outcomes attained outside formal education has been present at the EU level at least since the inauguration of the Bologna Process. Subsequently produced EU documents developed proposals of measures to be implemented both in member states and as part of international cooperation (cf. Figure A). The different documents complement one another.

⁹ Among other things, the European Qualifications Framework, the national qualifications frameworks, the ECTS and ECVET systems and the European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO) classification.

¹⁰ In some countries (e.g. France), the validation of competences acquired in non-formal and informal learning precedes the proliferation of the approach based on learning outcomes (Gmaj et al., 2016).

Figure A. Selected European Union initiatives and documents addressing the validation of learning outcomes outside formal education

	Initiatives for Youth	Lifelong learning	Higher and vocational education	European Union Strategy		
1999			Bologna Declaration			
2000		LLL Memorandum		Lisbon Strategy		
2001		European LLL Area				
2002			Copenhagen Declaration Council Resolution on the promotion of enhanced European cooperation in VET			
2003						
2004		European principles for the identification and validation of NFIL European validation inventory	Europass Maastricht Communiqué			
2005		European validation inventory				
2006	Resolution on the recognition of the value of non-formal and informal learning within the European youth field		Helsinki Communiqué			
2007	Youthpass					
2008		EQF European validation inventory	Bordeaux Communiqué			
2009		European guidelines for validation				
2010		European validation inventory	Bruges Communiqué			
2011			Council Resolution on a renewed European agenda for adult learning			
2012	Conclusion on a job-rich recovery and giving a better chance to Europe's youth	Validation recommendation				
2013	Guarantee for Youth					
2014		European validation inventory				
2015		European guidelines for validation				
					Education and Training 2020	
					Europe 2020	

Source: IBE.

2.1. Recognition of prior learning in higher education

1999 saw the initiation of the Bologna Process aimed at introducing a more comparable, compatible and coherent system of European higher education. In the declaration inaugurating this process, reference was made to the validation of learning outcomes attained outside formal education indirectly, through the system of credit accumulation and transfer (ETCS). The document emphasises that such credits may be acquired as the result of learning outside the higher education system to the extent that they (ECTS points) are recognised by the universities accepting the students (European Ministers of Education, 1999). This opened the door to the recognition of learning outcomes attained outside universities in many European countries¹¹.

2.2. Recognition of prior learning in vocational education and training and in lifelong learning

The Lisbon Strategy was adopted in the year 2000, which triggered a number of actions, processes and initiatives within the EU, relating to, among other things, vocational training, including the attainment of competences outside formal education. At the same time, lifelong learning started to be increasingly emphasised. The “Memorandum on Lifelong Learning” pointed to validation and counselling as among the priority actions within the lifelong learning strategy (European Commission, 2000). This message was reinforced one year later in the EC communication on “Making a European area of lifelong learning a reality” (European Commission, 2001).

Official calls for establishing common European rules on the validation of learning outcomes attained outside formal education appeared in 2002. The need to establish such rules is stated both in the “Council Resolution on the promotion of enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training” and in the Copenhagen Declaration, inaugurating the Copenhagen Process (Council of the European Union, 2002; Council of the European Union, European Commission, 2002).

As a result, 2004 saw the establishment of “Common European principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning” (see Table A).

11 In Poland, the amended Act on Higher Education that took effect in the 2014/2015 academic year introduced the option for universities to recognise competences attained outside the higher education system. In consequence, adults with appropriate professional experience (2, 3 or 5 years) will be able to commence a study programme according to the new procedure and be granted ETCS points (though not more than 50%) on the basis of having previously attained recognised competences, which will shorten their period of study. Universities were required to adopt relevant internal resolutions by June 30, 2015.

Table A. Common European principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning

Individual entitlements	The identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning should, in principle, be a voluntary matter for the individual. There should be equal access and equal and fair treatment for all individuals. The privacy and rights of the individual are to be respected.
Obligations of stakeholders	Stakeholders, should establish, in accordance with their rights, responsibilities and competences, systems and approaches for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning. These should include appropriate quality assurance mechanisms. Stakeholders should provide guidance, counselling and information about these systems and approaches to individuals.
Confidence and trust	The processes, procedures and criteria for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning must be fair, transparent and underpinned by quality assurance mechanisms.
Credibility and legitimacy	<p>Systems and approaches for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning should respect the legitimate interests and ensure the balanced participation of the relevant stakeholders.</p> <p>The process of assessment should be impartial and mechanisms should be put in place to avoid any conflict of interest. The professional competence of those who carry out assessment should also be assured.</p>

Source: Council of the European Union, 2004, p. 5.

In the conclusion of this document, the Council of the European Union divides validation into the identification of competences and their official recognition¹². At the same time, the importance of these processes for the learner was stressed, particularly in the context of entering or returning to the labour market. The role of stakeholders (among others, educational institutions, employers, third sector organisations) in validation was also highlighted (Council of the European Union, 2004).

In December 2004, the Europass tool was introduced, enabling a person to define and document competences attained outside formal education. The

¹² This was the first step in identifying the two main goals of validation – having a qualification awarded and identifying the competences attained by an individual.

same year saw the first unveiling of the European Inventory on the Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning¹³, collecting information about the validation solutions used in different European countries (Box A).

Box A. The European Inventory on the Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning

The *European Inventory on the Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning* includes reports on the validation solutions used in EU member states and thematic reports on this topic.

The *Inventory* was first published in 2004. At the moment of writing this text, there have been 5 editions so far (2004, 2005, 2008, 2010 and 2014). The 2014 edition contains:

- 36 reports from 33 EU member states (including Poland),
- 8 thematic reports (on enhancing the visibility of validation, the assessment of competences in the private sector, various methods of identifying competences in the public sector, the management of the validation system at various levels, the role of counsellors and counselling in validation, the status of research on validation, the use of validation to help persons leaving education prematurely, and the methods used in validation),
- case studies,
- a compendium of projects on validation conducted in various European countries,
- a summary report.

Source: IBE.

The topic of validation as one of the priorities of educational policy was raised in subsequent communiqués published as part of the Copenhagen Process (Maastricht Communiqué of 2004, Helsinki Communiqué of 2006, Bordeaux Communiqué of 2008, Bruges Communiqué of 2010) addressing this topic from various angles, among others, as a way of achieving a more flexible approach to education, essential in the face of the aging of European communities (Council of the European Union, European Commission, 2010).

The economic crisis of 2007–2008 provided an impetus for the restatement of EU priorities. Education was seen as the chance to enhance innovation

¹³ The operation of the *Inventory* is the responsibility of the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), which is an agency of the European Union.

and competitiveness in the economy. This was reflected in the “Europe 2020 Strategy” announced in 2010, but had been visible in earlier initiatives on vocational education and training (among others, in the Communiqués of Bordeaux and Bruges mentioned above) and in the work on subsequent instruments to implement the concept of lifelong learning.

In 2008, the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF) was established. The tool is intended to enable the comparability of qualifications awarded in different countries. The Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning refers to validation in two ways:

- by stating that qualifications from every EQF level should “be attainable by way of a variety of educational and career paths”, by individuals following “a variety of education and career paths”. (European Parliament, the Council of the European Union, 2008, p. 2).
- by requiring member states implementing the recommendation to promote “(...) the validation of non-formal and informal learning in accordance with the common European principles agreed in the Council conclusions”. (European Parliament, the Council of the European Union, 2008).

Based on this Recommendation, an EQF Advisory Group was established, which developed 10 criteria for referencing national qualifications frameworks to the EQF. An analysis of the fulfilment of these criteria is presented by every country referring its framework to the EQF. The third criterion was formulated in the following way: “The national qualifications framework or system and its qualifications are based on the principle and objective of learning outcomes and linked to arrangements for validation of non-formal and informal learning and, where these exist, to credit systems” (European Qualifications Framework Advisory Group, 2009, p. 2).

In the “Council Resolution on a renewed European agenda for adult learning” of 2011, the validation of learning outcomes attained outside formal education is named as one of five priority areas in adult learning for 2012–2014. In order to reach the target of 15% of adults in learning and increase the share of the population having completed higher education or its equivalent to 40%, member states should focus on “putting in place fully functional systems for validating non-formal and informal learning and promoting their use by adults of all ages and at all qualification levels, as well as by enterprises and other organisations.” (Council of the European Union, 2011, p. 5).

A certain stage of analyses and discussions conducted in Europe about the role of validation as an important component in the system of actions for the benefit of lifelong learning culminated in the issuance in 2012 of the “Recommendation of the Council of the European Union on the validation of non-formal and informal learning” (Council of the European Union, 2012). It should be underlined that the recommendation mentions two main goals of undergoing validation (being awarded a qualification and personal development), whereas the European Commission and the EU agencies initially only emphasised the way competences attained in the workplace could be confirmed and the aim was to gain a qualification (Annan, Bretschneider, 2015). In addition, the recommendation identifies four stages in validation instead of the only two indicated earlier of the identification and recognition (certification) of learning outcomes. According to the recommendation, each of the four stages can occur in a different place, at a different time and involve different validation practitioners.

The recommendation provided the impetus to member states to take relevant actions. It should be remembered here that in some countries, the solutions making it possible to formally assess and confirm the knowledge and skills attained outside school or university, e.g. through job experience, had been implemented earlier (cf. Gmaj et al., 2016).

2.3. Validation of learning outcomes attained outside formal education in terms of the activation of youth

The role of validating learning outcomes attained outside formal education was noticed not only in the areas of adult education and vocational education and training.

The situation of youth (individuals below 25 years of age) is of particular concern to the European Commission. The unemployment rate among youth in the EU has been above 20% for 5 years (compared to less than 9% for the overall unemployment rate) and is constantly growing (Eurostat, 2015). At the same time, the percentage of persons prematurely ending their education in EU member states was 13% in 2013. This is a decrease of the 17% reported in 2002, but it is still above the target of 10% or less set in the “Europe 2020” strategy (Eurostat, 2014).

The 2006 “Resolution on the recognition of the value of non-formal and informal learning within the European youth field” emphasises the fact that informal learning and non-formal education supplement formal education and due to their nature (among other things, flexibility of the forms of learning and frequently being closely aligned with hobbies) are particularly valuable to youth.

The resolution emphasises that member states should implement solutions making it possible to recognise learning outcomes attained by youth outside formal education and involve, among others, youth organisations and NGOs in the process (Council of the European Union, 2006). In this way, the validation of learning outcomes attained outside formal education was recognised as one of the instruments aiding the situation of youth.

The initiatives for youth which appeared in the following years perceive the topic of the validation of learning outcomes attained outside formal education as an important tool facilitating the assessment of competences acquired in various ways. 2007 saw the implementation of Youthpass, a tool making it possible to identify and document competences achieved outside school¹⁴.

The “Council Recommendation on establishing a Youth Guarantee” of 2012 and the “Council Conclusion on a job-rich recovery and giving a better chance to Europe's youth” of 2013 also emphasise the importance of validation. With validation, individuals who ended their education prematurely are able to have qualifications awarded. The use of the tool can also result, among other things, in the certification of competences gained during voluntary work, enhancing the chances of young people to find employment.

3. Guidelines for validating learning outcomes attained outside formal education at the European level

The establishment in 2004 of the common European guidelines for validation discussed above provided the impetus for subsequent international initiatives in this area.

In 2009, Cedefop published “European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning”. The publication was the result of more than two years of sharing experiences on validation by more than 20 countries. The publication contains general guidelines that take into account seven thematic areas:

- the European perspective,
- the national perspective,
- the organisational perspective,

¹⁴ “Youthpass” was implemented as a tool serving the participants of the projects conducted as part of the “Youth in Action” programme. It helps youth describe what they have done and demonstrate what they have learned. The programme was established on November 15, 2006 under decision No. 1719/2006//EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of the programme in 2007–2013. The subsequent edition of this programme is part of “Erasmus+”.

- the individual perspective,
- the structure of validation procedures,
- the methods of assessing learning outcomes,
- the persons performing validation (validation practitioners).

A new version of the “Guidelines” published in 2015 takes into account the 2012 Council Recommendation on validation.

It is also worth noting that the European Commission and its various agencies are not the only institutions involved in validation activities at the international level. In 2012, the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning published a set of guidelines on the validation of learning outcomes attained outside the formal system (“UNESCO guidelines for the Recognition, Validation and Accreditation of the Outcomes of Non-formal and Informal Learning”). The aim of the publication is to provide general guidelines on the principles and mechanisms which can help individual countries in developing or improving the validation process.

The publication presents the following six principles of the validation process:

- 1) Ensuring equity and inclusiveness in access to learning opportunities. Every individual should have the right to access and engage in any form of learning suited to his/ her needs, and have their learning outcomes made visible and valued.*
- 2) Promoting the equal value of learning outcomes of formal, non-formal and informal learning. Competences that every individual has accumulated through non-formal and informal learning should be treated on a par with those that are obtained through formal learning.*
- 3) Ensuring the centrality of individuals in the [recognition, validation and accreditation] RVA process. The process should respect and reflect individuals’ needs, and their participation should be on a voluntary basis. [...].*
- 4) Improving flexibility and openness of formal education and training. Education and training systems should consider diverse forms of learning, taking into account learners’ needs and experiences.*

- 5) *Promoting quality assurance in the entire RVA process. It is imperative that criteria and procedures for assessing and validating non-formal and informal learning are relevant, reliable, fair and transparent.*
- 6) *Strengthening partnerships among all stakeholders. It is important to emphasise a shared responsibility from design through to implementation and evaluation of the RVA system* (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2012, p. 4).

In addition, the publication proposes key actions at the national level making it possible to implement the guidelines.

Summary

In the past 16 years, the European Union has substantially extended the perspectives for validating learning outcomes attained outside formal education. While validation was initially used only to confirm professional experience in order to have a qualification awarded, it is now also used to identify an individual's competences and to guide relevant personal development. Counselling plays an important role in this process.

As an integral component of qualifications, the validation of learning outcomes attained outside formal education is a major part of EU activities to promote lifelong learning. At the same time, the scope of its application extends beyond adult education. The validation of learning outcomes attained outside university or school is a widely used tool in higher education in some European countries (e.g. Finland, France, the Netherlands, Poland, and the United Kingdom). It is also part of the vocational training of youth.

The evolution of the way validation is perceived has promoted its qualitative and quantitative development. Confidence in the results of validating learning outcomes attained outside the formal education system is also growing and, as a consequence, is being used ever more widely in various European countries.

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The validation of learning outcomes in Poland – new opportunities for attaining qualifications

What has changed in the assessment of competences with the recently introduced Act on the Integrated Qualifications System? What exactly is validation? What methods are used in validation? Who should be involved in the process?

This publication answers these and other questions, which are primarily important for awarding bodies and entities interested in gaining the authority to provide certification. It is also addressed to ministries and external quality assurance institutions, career counsellors and teachers, as well as others interested in the topic of validation.

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