

Poland – assuring the quality of learning outcomes: using learning outcomes to describe qualifications which meet the needs of the labour market

Since December 2015, market qualifications have been included in Poland's Integrated Qualifications System (IQS). The IQS includes market qualifications, regulated qualifications and qualifications which can be awarded in general, vocational and higher education systems. All qualifications in the IQS are assigned to a level on the Polish Qualifications Framework – this assignment is completed by reviewing the learning outcomes which relate to the appropriate level in the Polish Qualifications Framework. Market qualifications

- ❖ are based on the learning outcomes approach. This means the starting point for the development of the qualifications is not the teaching process or programme but competences and learning outcomes;
- ❖ meet the needs of the labour market and society;
- ❖ can be obtained by non-formal training and informal learning; and
- ❖ they are an important element of life-long learning.

Market qualifications are developed and awarded by a range of organisations such as social organisations, associations, professional groups, etc. Each organisation which intends to introduce a market qualification to the IQS must:

- ❖ demonstrate that the qualification meets the current and anticipated social, labour market and economic needs at the regional, national and European level;
- ❖ take account of the opinions of business organisations, the labour market trends, forecasts for the development of technology, and the national and regional development strategies. Before a qualification is added to the IQS, the ministry asks stakeholders and experts to provide an opinion on whether the qualification meets the needs of the labour market and society.

There is an assumption in the IQS that describing qualifications in terms of learning outcomes is one of the main conditions of ensuring their quality. This assumption is supported by the legal requirement to describe market qualifications by using learning outcomes. This enables the qualifications to:

- ❖ support lifelong learning policy;
- ❖ be used to validate competences acquired by non-formal training and informal learning;
- ❖ be comparable in Poland and abroad; and
- ❖ meet the needs of the labour market.

The legislation for the IQS requires:

- ❖ that market qualifications are described using learning outcomes;
- ❖ three ways to describe learning outcomes in every market qualification;

- ❖ that learning outcomes required for the qualification should relate to the characteristics of the appropriate level in the Polish Qualification Framework;
- ❖ consultation with stakeholders to prove there is a demand for the qualification;
- ❖ the collection of expert opinions on the demand for the qualification and the learning outcomes;
- ❖ a substantive assessment of the qualification including validity of learning outcomes (checking whether the learning outcomes would enable the person with the qualification to complete the activities described). This is part of the process conducted by the Ministry responsible for the qualification;
- ❖ a review of the qualifications;
- ❖ the monitoring of the IQS.

The guidelines for describing qualifications explain the following three ways to describe learning outcomes:

- ❖ a description of the learning outcomes should briefly describe actions which the person with the qualification is able to carry out, the level of complexity of the actions, circumstances in which the person with the qualification is able to carry out the actions and the level of his/her autonomy and responsibility;
- ❖ learning outcomes must be grouped into sets in reference to specific actions. There must be a name for each set, and its level in the Polish Qualification Framework and approximate workload needed to achieve the learning outcomes in each set have to be determined. Sets of learning outcomes allow learners to obtain the qualification over time which is one way to respond to each person's abilities and circumstances. Sets of learning outcomes could be shared among qualifications. Once validated they do not have to be re-validated in the process of obtaining another qualification that includes the same set;
- ❖ there should be a description of each learning outcome in terms of skills and assessment criteria. The assessment criteria need to describe the specific knowledge and social skills required to obtain the learning outcome. The learning outcomes need to be clear, unambiguous, obtainable, verifiable and understandable.

There are also guidelines in which operational verbs should be used to describe learning outcomes.

The quality assurance processes surrounding the preparation of the descriptions of qualifications and the processes for entering qualification on the IQS are the most developed measures of quality assurance (there are legal requirements and guidelines). The processes to quality assure the outcome dimension of describing learning outcomes is less well developed. However, in relation to both the input and output dimensions of quality assurance there are some challenges and problems. The following list contains the most important challenges concerning the quality assurance of describing learning outcomes in the IQS:

- ❖ previous experience has shown that guidelines for describing market qualifications are very important but not sufficient. For example, guidelines for developing a name for the qualification and identifying the need for a qualification should be more detailed.

Some expert and methodological support is necessary. Otherwise, many applications are rejected at the early stage, even if the qualification is needed by the labour market or society;

- ❖ the biggest challenge is the availability of people with the competence and experience of describing learning outcomes. Consequently, ministries can have a problem in finding a sufficient number of experts who are competent to prepare an opinion about an applied qualification;
- ❖ there is a need to develop relevant guidelines for ministries who are responsible for evaluating qualifications before entering them on the IQR e.g., there are no specific guidelines on how to decide whether the new qualification is too similar to another qualification which already exists in the IQS;
- ❖ at this stage of the IQS' operation the scope and methodological approaches used by experts and the Ministry in evaluating the quality and design of qualifications have not been defined and tested. Therefore, we do not know if expert opinions and the relevant ministry's assessment of qualifications based on learning outcomes are sufficiently quality assured. In addition, the role of the organisation which applies to include the qualification in the IQS is not clear during the subsequent stages of this application process;
- ❖ according to the legislation on IQS, a review of qualifications will be conducted at least every seven years. This is a long time especially at this early stage of developing the IQS. It is possible to review a qualification when there are some socio-economic reasons. However, no aspect of the review procedure (causes, scope, methodology etc.) has been defined in detail. Thus, at this stage we do not know if this review process will be effective;
- ❖ the monitoring of IQS has not been planned and defined in detail. We do not know what it will cover and to what extent it will include learning outcomes.

The IQS is at an early stage of operation. Some of the quality assurance measures concerning the design of market qualifications have been introduced through legislation but they have not yet been developed and tested. They will be implemented and adjusted on a step-by-step basis in line with emerging experience.

It is vital to spread greater awareness of the learning outcome approach and explain the advantages of this way of working.

The following sources [some of which are in Polish] were used in the case study:

- ❖ [Law on Integrated Qualification System](#)
- ❖ Dybaś, M. (ed.) (2015). [The quality assurance of qualification in the integrated qualification system](#). Warsaw: Instytut Badań Edukacyjnych,
- ❖ Sławiński, S., Królik, K., Stęchły, W. (2016). [Entering qualifications to the Polish Qualification System](#). Warsaw: Instytut Badań Edukacyjnych,
- ❖ Ziewiec-Skokowska, G., Danowska-Florczyk, E., Stęchły, W. (eds). (2016). [How to describe market qualifications for the Polish](#)

[Qualifications System. A Guidebook.](#)

Warsaw: Instytut Badań Edukacyjnych.

More information is available from the National Reference Point.

The information was gathered in 2008 and updated in 2022. For more detailed information on this case study, please visit the national website.