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“Transferring methods for validation of informal learning to VET institutions in the field of sustainable agriculture”

# **National implementation strategy for converting current non-formal courses into formal courses and validating previous learning**

Suggestions for the Polish strategy

Language version: English

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## **1. CONVERTING NON-FORMAL COURSES.**

### **1.1. The aim of course.**

In Poland, the authority and licence to deliver formal education (formal courses) have only schools and educational institutions which operate within the National Act of Education System (Ustawa o systemie oświaty). Article 2 of this Act strictly defines such institutions.

Lifelong Learning, defined as “all learning activities throughout life, with the aims of improving knowledge, skills and competences, within a personal, civic, social and/or employment related perspectives”, is about providing a second chance to update basic skills and offering learning opportunities at more advanced levels. All this means that formal systems of provision need to be more open and flexible, so that such opportunities can be truly tailored to the needs of potential learners. The first document on the development of Lifelong Learning (LLL) was adopted in Poland in 2007. The government is currently working on a new document on LLL which will also set the agenda for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning.

In a longer perspective, linking formal, informal and non-formal education into one system with the help of national vocational qualifications standards and validation process, is the first step towards development of lifelong learning and supporting by that the personnel of the knowledge based modern economy. Some conditions of the system were laid in the Ministry for National Education’s disposition (f.ex.. Ministry for Education Act from 18 September 2007 r. regarding eksternal examinations) as well as assumptions in changing of the model for examination confirming vocational qualification as set in Operational Program Human Capital (PO KL) 2007-2013.

### **1.2. What is needed in order to fulfil the requirements.**

In 2008 work started on the Polish Qualification Framework (PQF) covering the whole of the education and training systems. Since February 2011, the public has been debating on a model of the Polish Qualifications Framework, organised as a part of the European-style Qualifications Project.

The PQF is being developed with the joint involvement of academicians, employers, employees and teachers.

The Polish Qualifications Framework introduces a new way of describing and validating qualifications, which are achieved at various levels of education and learning, through the use of many pathways of acquiring knowledge, both informal as well as non-formal. These changes will impact everyone – persons who issue diplomas validating a qualification or those who achieve a qualification, persons who assess someone’s competences or those who order training workshops, persons who train or those who learn, persons who are searching for a specific type of worker or those who are planning their professional development

### **1.3. ECVET points according to country specific standards.**

The system of vocational education and training in Poland is currently being modernized by introducing numerous changes, such as defining qualifications required for specific occupations and defining sets of skills for each qualification together with learning outcomes. This modifications will allow easier ECVET implementation in the future, however the details of applying ECVET in Poland need further development and examination. The overall aim of the ECVET national team is to continue the work and follow-up the achievements undertaken by the previous National ECVET Experts team under the project (2012-2013) and also to provide that the relevant actors involved in vocational education and training on a national and regional level are efficiently supported to best use ECVET.

### **1.4. Prepare a document for participant that show exactly what learning objects / elements / units are fulfilled and what are not fulfilled.**

A person who is learning generally achieves some learning outcomes after a period of time, or in other words, acquires certain competences. If these learning outcomes are positively assessed by a body authorised for this purpose, and the sum of the outcomes consist of a defined set (of acquired competences) that fulfil established requirements, the authorised body (after having checked that

the learner has fulfilled the requirements) can then issue a formal document (diploma, certificate) confirming the achievement of the described competencies.

## **2. VALIDATION OF NON FORMAL PREVIOUS LEARNING KNOWLEDGE**

### **2.1. Searching for proper authority to contact and check for requirements.**

So far, there is no system for validating and recognising qualifications/skills and competences acquired within non-formal and informal education in Poland. There are separate solutions in different branches: external examinations by territorial examination boards allow adults to receive the certificate. However, external examinations confirming vocational qualifications (including agriculture field) are foreseen only for the graduates of particular vocational (including agriculture) schools. According to the planned new reform of vocational education, connected to the work on the national qualification system, the vocational system examination will be unified regardless of learning forms, school or non-school.

However, some regional or national based initiatives, as far as validation and accreditation of skills and competencies gained in non-formal way, have been taken and it works. Eg. the main institutions in Poland who deal with APL/APEL are the Chambers of Crafts and Commerce. In some cases VET schools and/or VET institutions networks deal with it as well. The Chambers of Crafts regulate the access the IVET system as well as the state-certified non-formal trainings in all kinds of sectors. Within the Chambers, the departments responsible for state-exams, for certain state-certified professions, could be responsible to the validation and accreditation of non-formal competencies. The same role, as accrediting body, for validation of outcomes of non-formal training could take VET school networks cooperating with Career Centres. Career counselors and lifelong learning professionals provide support during the counseling process, which usually lead to the development of the Individual Action Plan by clients and then implementing this plan into practice.

### **2.2. Steps of Validation/Accreditation.**

The accreditation of skills and professional qualifications is done as a result of the application of a process making use of one of the three methods to identify the quantity and type of skills and professional qualifications that the candidate had mastered.

If we assume that any individual, regardless the way they acquired their professional qualifications or skills, can be subject to the non-formal and informal learning accreditation, then within the course of the accreditation procedure we should take into account at least **three possible scenarios** concerning the situation that the participant may be in.

**The participant can:**

- have a set of documents (certificates) confirming the types and certified levels of prior education,
- not have any documents (certificates) confirming the type and effects of prior education,
- have certificates (documents) giving a description of the type and effects of prior education but have also undergone further training improving their skills or professional qualifications (e.g. gained as experience at a workplace) and would like to get a certificate as their formal confirmation.

**The above mentioned scenarios generate three methods of accreditation, each based on:**

- taking of evidence (its integral part would form analyzing the documentation supplied by a candidate),
- examination proceedings (practical exam adjusted to the type and range of the skills and/or professional qualifications subject to accreditation),
- verification process (combining the elements of taking of evidence and practical exam).

The accreditation/validation process is structured into the three parts counselling, evaluation and accreditation, finishing with preparing and handing over a proper certificate.

**2.2.1. Counselling (help of advisors to collect documentations)**

Candidates applying for the accreditation of skills and professional qualifications should:

- submit an application form for the accreditation of skills and professional qualifications together with necessary attachments (as required by the accreditation procedure),
- make a payment for the accreditation of skills and professional qualifications, if necessary
- prepare and submit evidence documents if required by the accreditation procedure.

In this process, candidates should have a counsellor who guides her/him through the process, encourages and takes care, that all necessary documentations are brought into consideration.

The counsel helps the candidate to collect all necessary documentation (evidences). The candidate should describe all achieved learning objects in a most detailed way (what object was when where how by whom learned). In addition to this description, supporting documents who serve as evidence for the aforementioned facts should be brought by. These may be employment references, VET school certificates, university certificates, letters of recommendations etc. When applicable, work samples can be brought by as well. (e.g. in creative professions) Furthermore, the counsellor could provide the candidate with assignment/exam templates for the external exams preparation. Counsellors discuss the achieved learning outcomes with the candidate and prepare the documentation for the evaluation process.

### **2.2.2. Evaluation (help of committee)**

The description of the achieved learning outcomes with the supporting documents will then be evaluated by assessors or other evaluation experts. After that, the expert decides about the proper method of examination of the candidate (interview, external practical exam, further evidences) and carries out the examination or informs the candidate about the exam dates. The exams will be realised following to APL procedure.

### 2.2.3. Accreditation/Certification

When the exams are successfully passed, the candidates will be handed out her/his certificate.

#### **Responsibilities and tasks during the Accreditation/Certification process:**

##### **Director of the Accrediting Institution:**

- implementation and supervision of application of the procedure,
- defining the regulations concerning fees for the accreditation of skills and professional qualifications at accrediting institution,
- approving the schedule for the accreditation of skills and professional qualifications,
- determining the staff of the Accreditation Commission and appointing chairperson and members of the Accreditation Commission,
- supervising the correctness of the process of accreditation of skills and professional qualifications,
- signing the accreditation certificates (documents),
- managing the appeals and complaints lodged by accreditation's participants,
- supervising the storage and archiving of the documents for the accreditation of skills and professional qualifications.

##### **Office worker at the accrediting body:**

- running an information campaign about the accreditation of skills and professional qualifications,
- taking note of applications submitted or mailed by the UAs who pledged their will to take part the accreditation of skills and professional qualifications,
- keeping in touch with the customer (person who wants to have her/his competences accredited) by mail,
- handing over applications for the accreditation of skills and professional qualifications,
- accepting accreditation fees and issuing receipts,

- filling in the accreditation certificate (document) forms with personal data and information about the accredited skills and professional qualifications,
- issuing the accreditation certificates (documents),
- taking note of appeals and complaints,
- storing and archiving of the documents for the accreditation of skills and professional qualifications,
- carrying out any other tasks appointed by the director of accrediting body in a proper way and on time.

**Chairperson of the Accreditation Commission:**

- content and methodical correctness of the examination subjects and tasks,
- operation and outcomes of the accreditation commission,
- task and work distribution done by the accreditation commission,
- correct documenting of the accreditation of skills and professional qualifications,
- signing the accreditation certificates (documents).

**Examiner of the Accreditation Commission:**

- preparing a set of subjects for the written part of the accreditation examination and the tasks for practical examination,
- carry out jobs falling within the scope of accreditation in a correct way and on time,
- signing the accreditation certificates (documents).

**Other members of the Accreditation Commission:**

- realisation of an information campaign about the accreditation of skills and professional qualifications,
- registering the applications for accreditation and preparing the submitted documents,
- submitting proposals concerning the schedule for the accreditation of skills and professional qualifications, and the number of accreditation applicants,
- preparing a schedule for the accreditation of skills and professional qualifications,

- preparing the practical accreditation examination in terms of organization and technical aspects (as well as provide materials for the practical examination),
- preparing an exam's place,
- carrying out a public opinion survey and assess the level of customer satisfaction with direct survey (including working out the research instruments),
- handing an exam's place over for standard service,
- making a comprehensive register of the public opinion survey results on the basis of the questionnaires, and handing the register over to the director of the accreditation body,
- numbering the accreditation certificates (documents),
- verifying the content of the records which are to be put down in the accreditation certificates (documents),
- making note of customers' personal data and the accredited skills and professional qualifications, and filling in the accreditation certificates (documents),
- issuing the accreditation certificates (documents),
- collecting and storing copies of the issued certificates,
- handing over the materials concerning the accreditation of skills and professional qualifications, and then prepare them for storage and archiving.

#### **Chairperson of the Audit Commission:**

- realisation of investigative proceedings in relation to the cases of invalidating the accreditation certificates,
- institute investigative proceedings pertaining to the appeals or complaints.

#### **Member of the Audit Commission**

- carrying out the tasks under investigative proceedings and instituted by the Audit Commission on time and correctly,
- carrying out other assigned tasks.

### **3. VALIDATION OF INFORMAL PREVIOUS LEARNING KNOWLEDGE.**

#### **3.1. Searching for proper authority to contact and check for requirements.**

The same procedure as for non-formal previous learning knowledge, see 2.1.

#### **3.2. Steps of Validation/Accreditation.**

##### **3.2.1. Counselling (help of advisors to collect documentations)**

The same procedure as for non-formal previous learning knowledge, see 2.2.1

##### **3.2.2. Evaluation (help of committee)**

The same procedure as for non-formal previous learning knowledge, see 2.2.2

##### **3.2.3. Accreditation/Certification**

The same procedure as for non-formal previous learning knowledge, see 2.2.3

### **Conclusion and recommendation**

For quality assurance of the process of identification and validation of prior learning outcomes it is necessary:

- not to simplify the process of recognition only to examination performance, however take into account that this is a long-term process (e.g. in some countries the recognition of prior learning outcomes may take even half a year), which involves also another possibilities described in this document,

- to establish the role of counsellor/adviser considered as a very important person for a successful verification process,
- to train advisers and assessors, so that these would be able to perform their roles in the process of recognition on a qualified level,
- to assure accessibility of the recognition system for everyone,
- to create common assessment standards containing only necessary competencies required by the labor market, which will be verifiable through performance of working activity,
- to involve social partners and/or employers into the entire process of recognition, including development of assessment standards,
- to assure that authorized person dispose of adequate workplace equipment for recognition,
- Participants entering the process of recognition should be at least 18 years old.