

The Skills Audit Method

A Practical Guide for Counsellors



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Authors:

Roksana Pierwieniecka
Zuzanna Cichowska

Reviewers:

Ewa Bacia
Ewa Bodzińska-Guzik
Barbara Górka

English Translation:

Barbara Przybylska

Layout:

Wojciech Maciejczyk

Cover Illustration:

Shutterstock.com

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ul. Górczewska
801-180 Warszawa
tel. +48 22 241 71 00; www.ibe.edu.pl

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1. Introduction

The Skills Audit Method (SAM) is used to identify, describe and document competences and to prepare development plans for further educational and career paths. It can be applied in various contexts. These include:

- the counselling process (in labour offices, academic career bureaus, schools, psychological and pedagogical counselling centres, NGOs, projects for people at risk of exclusion or as part of commercial counselling services);
- to identify the competences of persons applying for admission to higher education as part of the confirmation of acquired learning outcomes;
- human resources (HR) management in companies to recruit and manage talent;
- validation, i.e. the confirmation of acquired learning outcomes performed by awarding bodies issuing market qualifications.

Development History of the Skills Audit Method

In accordance with the 2012 [Recommendation of the Council of the European Union](#) on the validation of non-formal and informal learning, citizens, especially those who are unemployed or at risk of becoming unemployed, should be able to do a skills audit. It is intended to help the individual analyse their work experience, to identify what they know and are able to do, and to plan their career path. It can also help prepare for the validation of learning outcomes ([see section 3.4](#)).

Almost every EU country has put in place solutions for skills audits. They are presented, among others, in the report "[Skills Audits: tools to identify talent](#)" (Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, 2018).

The Skills Audit Method described here was developed in Poland in 2015. It was prepared by the Educational Research Institute in cooperation with the Regional Labour Office in Kraków.¹ Since 2016, it has been used in the Małopolska region within the "Kierunek Kariera" [Career Direction] project. More information about this can be found

¹ This was done as part of the project "Developing the national qualifications system – pilot implementation of the national qualifications system and its promotional campaign".

at the [project website](#) and in the Good Practices [Database on Validation and Quality Assurance](#).²

In 2018–2020, staff at the Educational Research Institute worked on adapting SAM to the specific needs of career counsellors working outside labour offices and with different beneficiaries.³ We chose the *design thinking* method to work on the adaptation, starting with a diagnosis of the situation, through to including users in its development. As a result, a prototype was created, tested and the final result was improved.

The first part of the process encompassed exploratory research on the use of skills audits in Poland and selected non-European countries (Canada and Singapore). Then data analysis was performed and a focus group workshop was held with counsellors from the Regional Labour Office in Kraków, who apply the method in their everyday work. After this, the *design thinking* workshops⁴ were conducted with people who could potentially use SAM: career counsellors,⁵ career coaches and those working in HR.

On the basis of the results of the workshop, a prototype was developed in the form of a website and tools to enable users to do a skills audit online. The prototype was tested during a pilot study⁶ with the participation of 12 career counsellors. They conducted the skills audit with their clients using the designed tools. Both they and their clients gave feedback to prepare the final version of the materials, which includes this booklet. *The Skills Audit Method. A Practical Guide for Counsellors* was then reviewed.⁷

A website with information for career counsellors and those considering doing the audit was also developed. A digital tool, [My Portfolio](#), was further elaborated, enabling its use to inventory competences, create a portfolio and formulate development plans.

² Ewa Bodzińska-Guzik described the development of the skills audit method in the article “Bilansowanie kompetencji, czyli wsparcie dla każdego” [Auditing competences, or support for everyone], published in *Kwartalnik Doradca Kariery* [Career Counsellor Quarterly], no. 2019/2.

³ This was done as part of the project “Support to central government administration, awarding bodies and quality assurance institutions in implementing stage II of the Integrated Qualifications System”.

⁴ The firm Cooperativa prepared and conducted the workshops

⁵ We are referring here to counsellors in labour offices, academic career bureaus, NGOs working with persons with disabilities, schools, psychological and educational counselling centres.

⁶ The pilot was designed and conducted by Fundacja Pracownia Badań i Innowacji Społecznych “Stocznia” [Shipyard Foundation].

⁷ The reviewers were: Dr. Ewa Bacia, expert on the validation of learning outcomes, Ewa Bodzińska-Guzik from the Kraków Regional Labour Office in Kraków and Barbara Górka from the Imago Foundation.

What Will You Find In This Booklet?

The booklet has four parts. The first part presents what a person conducting an audit using SAM should know and be able to do. The second part has guidelines on conducting an audit, and the third presents a step-by-step description of the process. The fourth part shows how the Skills Audit Method can be used in contexts other than in labour offices.

1.1. What Should a Person Conducting a Skills Audit Know and Be Able To Do?

Persons using the method should have a certain set of competences to support the client effectively.

The counsellor should be able to motivate a client and present the benefits of the audit in an appropriate way. The skills audit is often a long process, requiring a high degree of commitment from the client.

Another important skill is building a relationship of trust with the person undergoing the audit and providing a safe place to talk about various aspects of life. The audit concerns not only professional and educational issues, but often touches on personal life, which may be associated with difficult emotions.

In terms of its diagnostic part, the Skills Audit Method is based on semi-structured interviews. It is therefore very important that the counsellors conducting the audit are familiar with the principles and have experience in conducting biographical and behavioural interviews ([see section 2.2](#)).

In addition, the counsellor should – depending on the needs and abilities of the client – use additional diagnostic tools (e.g. tests to examine aptitudes, interests and skills; tools to assess motivation) and, where necessary, be qualified to use them.

During the audit, it is important to have good knowledge about the labour market (or its specific sectors), education and training markets, and where to find out more information about them. In addition, the counsellor should have knowledge about lifelong learning,

qualifications, the Integrated Qualifications System and validation. This information is used to determine the client's development plan.

It is also essential to be able to analyse and synthesise information in order to summarise and discuss the results of the process with the client at the end of the audit, taking into account the person's goals and needs. Also important is the ability to create plans to help the client further develop their competences.

The Regional Labour Office in Kraków has prepared a market qualification "[Conducting a Skills Audit](#)". The learning outcomes proposed there may be very useful for people who want to include the skills audit in their counselling work.

1.2. The Principles of Conducting a Skills Audit⁸

Voluntary

Undertaking a skills audit is voluntary. This means that the process will not begin without the consent of the client, who can opt out at any time.

Ownership

The client makes all decisions about the direction and scope of activities during the audit. This includes the materials developed and the decision about what is done with them afterwards.

Confidentiality and Privacy

The conversation with the career counsellor should take place in a setting ensuring privacy. Anything the person undergoing the audit shares with the counsellor stays between them. It is up to the client whether they will share the results of the audit with third parties (e.g. a potential employer).

The Role of the Counsellor







The skills audit is largely based on the client's own work (self-reflection, preparing a portfolio). The role of the counsellor is supportive, taking on the role of a guide during the process. The counsellor asks questions that raise the client's awareness of their

⁸ The principles were developed based on the form of SAM in 2015 and the workshops with career counsellors that were held in the autumn of 2019.

own competences; selects additional tools that help the client see a broader picture of themselves; supports the client in the work between the meetings (e.g. giving assignments to do at home or forms to fill in). Above all, the counsellor helps in using the right words to express skills, knowledge and social competences and to organise them based on what the client wants to achieve.

1.3. Selected Concepts

Icons are used in the booklet to indicate parts that should be noted.

					
attention	tools	meetings/ time needed	goal (setting, chang- ing)	list of competences/ portfolio	further development plan

The following terms have been defined for the purpose of working with the skills audit method. This means that they may have slightly different meanings in other contexts.

Competences

“Competences” are understood here as:

- knowledge – knowledge of a given field, information one has on a given topic;
- skills – the ability to perform a given activity, including the practical application of knowledge;
- social competence – responsibility and autonomy in applying knowledge and skills as well as “soft skills”.

The Integrated Qualifications System uses the term “learning outcomes” (cf. section 3.4), which we have decided to replace with the term “competences” for the purposes of the Skills Audit Method, in order to simplify the language and bring it closer to the clients’ experiences. More on how to describe competences can be found [later in this booklet](#).

Identifying Competences

This is a process aiming to:

- identify the areas in which a person has knowledge, skills and social competence, and where they need to fill in the gaps,
- determine and list the competences a person has.

More on this topic can be found [later in this booklet](#).

Preparing a Portfolio

This is the process of collecting evidence (e.g. the work a person has done, opinions of superiors) as well as descriptions of situations that demonstrate the possession of specific competences.

More on this topic can be found [later in this booklet](#).

1.4. The Benefits of a Skills Audit

The Skills Audit Method is useful in working with people in a variety of situations in life – from someone who needs a broad diagnosis of their competences to someone trying to get a specific job or promotion.

The skills audit can provide a number of benefits. These include:

1. Making it easier to prepare for a job search

- Writing down and developing a list of competences that can be used to prepare for a job search.
This can enable new versions of a CV to be created more quickly, allowing for a more effective job search.
- Adding previously unnoticed or undervalued competences to a CV, not only those resulting from professional life (e.g. knowledge and skills acquired in the course of pursuing a hobby).

This can be particularly important for people with little work experience or after a long break from being employed.

- Preparing for discussions of one's strengths during job interviews.

Linking competences with specific experiences and evidence can prepare a person to talk convincingly about having the competences needed for a job. This can also increase a client's confidence.

2. Planning career and professional development

- Determining a career path based on a broader perspective than one's current professional path.

The audit makes it possible to identify competences from different areas of life, including those acquired outside work. This allows a person to look at themselves from a new angle and to significantly broaden the horizon of the career or educational scenarios being considered. It can also facilitate thinking about more radical changes of which the client may not be aware.

- Preparing realistic plans based on a client's already existing resources.

By analysing what a person knows and can do, and what they don't yet know, goals can be verified from the perspective of whether the basis exists for developing in a given direction – even if it is not confirmed in the CV. In addition, plans can be modified in accordance with a client's predispositions.

- Writing out perspectives for development in the form of a plan, showing the way to reach the set goal step-by-step.

This can be an important element in building a sense of security. It is especially useful for people who are making very significant changes in their professional life and need to set realistic turning points.

- Facilitating the process of making educational decisions.

A skills audit can identify competence gaps. This makes it easier to choose studies or training. At the same time, the audit can demonstrate a person's strengths. This way, they can forgo a formal education path (the audit shows, for example, that the person has many competences and a short course would be a better option) or choose an area that is worth further development.

3. Discovering and organising a client's own resources

- Broadening the perspective in thinking about resources useful in the labour market. Broadening the thinking about competences to other areas outside of work is an important part of the skills audit. Clients are often surprised by how much they know and can do, because they do not take hobbies and experiences outside of work into account. This is especially important for young people or those with long breaks in employment. Broadening the perspective allows clients to see that they have many competences that are valuable in the labour market, which helps to boost their self-esteem.
- Providing external expert support in recognising strengths and key competences. Counsellors help to see and value competences that clients previously did not consider important or which seemed to be common in a particular industry. In such a situation, clients may unduly discount and overlook their own resources.
- Finding underlying themes in people's seemingly inconsistent CVs. Looking through the prism of competences allows all the threads of professional and non-professional experiences to be connected. Clients can then see that their career is heading in a particular direction. This way they can consciously decide to continue or modify it.
- Helping clients to learn about themselves and their strengths better than with the use of other counselling processes. Clients who have had experience with career guidance emphasise that the audit provides a more detailed analysis of strengths and weaknesses than other methods used in career counselling.

4. Strengthening self-esteem

The psychological reinforcement provided by summarising experiences and competences may prove to be one of the key benefits of doing a skills audit.

People who review the full list of their competences are often surprised by its length and diversity. It is also beneficial to look at oneself from the perspective of different experiences (not only where one studied or worked) and take into account the opinion of the counsellor.

As a result, a person's self-esteem may increase, they will be positively strengthened, look at themselves in a new light and perceive their own professionalism.

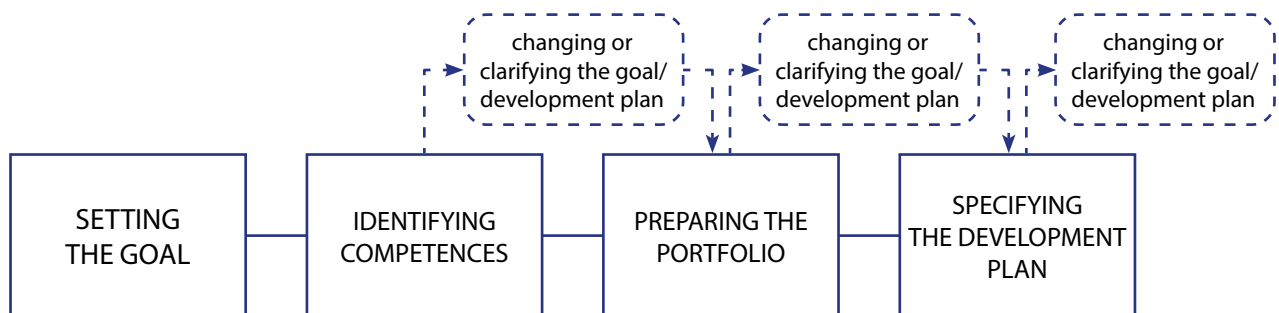
During the pilot of the Skills Audit Method, some persons reported that increased confidence in their own expert knowledge and abilities gave them an additional sense of security. This can lead to increasing empowerment, i.e. of "taking control over one's own career".

An important aspect of the Skills Audit Method is that after going through the whole process, apart from structuring information about oneself, the client receives tangible results, which can be used on different occasions, updated and further developed. The main products of the audit are the list of competences in the portfolio – evidence of the competences collected and described in one place, as well as a detailed development plan with specific steps to be taken in order to achieve a given goal. A CV can also be created based on the list of competences, and clients using My Portfolio can do this using the function available in this application.

2. Working with the Skills Audit Method

The skills audit should be conducted by a counsellor with the required **competences**, following the **principles** outlined above. The process consists of several steps (Fig. 1).

Figure 1: Steps in Using the Skills Audit Method



It is important to remember that the skills audit serves the client first and foremost. Therefore, it can be tailored to the needs of the individual.

The steps listed above do not have to be done in separate meetings. Some of the steps in the audit may occur simultaneously. For example, knowledge, skills and social competence can be identified with the client on an ongoing basis and the portfolio can start to be developed before the diagnosis phase ends.

Depending on the goal and needs of the client, only some elements of the audit may have to be implemented.



The duration of an audit will vary from person to person. This pertains to both face-to-face and online meetings, as well as the client's period of independent work.

Working with a person who wants to define their professional or educational goals as a result of the audit may require 4–6 meetings (a minimum of 2). However, a client who has clarified the purpose for which they are doing the skills audit will most likely need to meet 3–4 times. A client aiming for a specific job or qualification will usually want to shorten the counselling process. It may be that you will only meet 1–2 times.



We recommend that a meeting should last approximately 1.5 hours. However, the length can be adjusted in accordance with the client's needs, taking into account organisational capacity.

Additional Guidelines for Conducting an Audit

1. The counsellor conducting the skills audit should have experience in conducting biographical and behavioural interviews. It is also helpful for the counsellors to be familiar with the principles of lifelong learning and the Integrated Qualifications System.
2. Skills audit meetings can take place face-to-face or online – this depends on the arrangements made with the client
3. The audit can be conducted using a sheet of paper and pen and any portfolio template.

You can also use

- forms for writing down identified competences,
- My Portfolio electronic tool.

2.1. Introducing the Skills Audit and Setting the Goal the Client Wants To Achieve

The first step in the skills audit is to introduce the client to the process – to explain what the audit is, what it consists of and the benefits it can bring, as well as to present the principles of working with the Skills Audit Method.

The basic issue at this stage is to determine the client's educational or professional goal. What do they want to achieve with the skills audit? How much do they already know about themselves and how much do they hope to learn as a result of the audit?

Box 1 presents six fictional characters of different ages.⁹ Each of them needs the help of a counsellor for a different reason. Using their cases, we show the course of the skills audit using SAM. These descriptions are the result of the *design thinking* workshop (cf. Chapter 1)

Box 1. General Characterisation of Each Person

<p>John (63 years old)</p>	<p>John will retire in a few years. He doesn't know how he will manage financially then, so he would like to keep working.</p> <p>He spent nearly 30 years at a company manufacturing public transport vehicles and believes he has many skills in this field. However, he is not convinced that these skills could be useful in another job.</p> <p>He also knows that finding employment at his age is difficult. In addition, he has no job search experience and is unfamiliar with the market.</p> <p>John needs help in determining exactly which competences he has and in which industry they could be used.</p>
<p>Maria (22 years old)</p>	<p>Maria is studying international relations. To earn some extra money, she works at the reception desk of a fitness club on weekends. She has many interests but none that she is keen on.</p> <p>She wants a stable job in a nice atmosphere, but she does not know which sector or in which position she could work.</p> <p>She thinks she doesn't know much, even though she has always done well in school. She feels quite lost – she has never really given much thought to herself and her goals.</p> <p>Maria needs help in getting to know herself better, understanding her competences and sorting out what she considers important.</p>
<p>Thomas (45 years old)</p>	<p>Thomas was a manager in a film and photo digitization company for a number of years. However, due to health problems, he had a several-years' break in employment. He cannot return to his profession, so he wants to find a new job in a similar line of work.</p> <p>He has a lot of experience and specialist knowledge. He knows what he's good at, but not sure where he could work now and in which position because the market has changed so rapidly.</p> <p>He has trouble during job interviews, so far none have been successful. But he doesn't understand why.</p> <p>Thomas needs help in naming exactly what he can do and presenting this to employers in an attractive way.</p>

⁹ A full description of each character (in Polish) is presented on the website devoted to SAM.

<p>Elena (17 years old)</p>	<p>Elena came from Ukraine to study management (people in Ukraine take their school completion exams earlier than in Poland). The scholarship she has does not cover all the costs of living, so she wants to find a job – preferably relating to team management, but she would also be happy with some casual work.</p> <p>Previously, she helped her parents run a guest house, e.g. worked at the reception desk, handled social media and managed the work of others.</p> <p>In Poland, as a minor and without citizenship, she has very limited opportunities to find work. She does not speak Polish fluently, which is an additional barrier.</p> <p>Elena needs help in discovering what she will need to find employment as soon as possible.</p>
<p>Katherine (35 years old)</p>	<p>Katherine works in a small marketing company. In a few months, she is moving to Warsaw and looking for a new job. She is interested in a position at an advertising agency working with start-ups. The agency is currently recruiting for the position of senior manager, which involves managing several teams.</p> <p>So far, Katherine has headed a team of several people and wonders if she really has the skills required for this new position.</p> <p>She is busy and doesn't want to spend a lot of time in the counselling process.</p> <p>She wants to find out how much she really knows and can do of the tasks for the job she is most interested in. She is also willing to upgrade her skills by taking a course as soon as possible.</p>
<p>Paul (29 years old)</p>	<p>Paul is a tour guide in the city. He has been active in scouting for many years, where he is an instructor. He would like to attain a market qualification on teaching adolescents aged 12–15. He is hoping that in this way he can obtain a certificate that is recognised outside of scouting. This also could be useful if he decides to change jobs in the future.</p> <p>He needs help in preparing his portfolio – this is the element that will be assessed by a validation committee. At the same time, he is not entirely sure whether he needs further training in one of the required areas.</p>
<p>Evelina (16 years old)</p>	<p>Evelina is in the second year of vocational secondary school in the culinary arts. Soon she will have to choose the subjects in which she will be examined for her secondary school completion diploma. She has no specific interests, the choice of the school was a bit random – there was not much of an offer of vocational secondary schools in her town. She wants to start working quickly and earn her own money, but she is not interested in a career in the culinary arts. After graduation she would like to go to a bigger city or abroad.</p> <p>She came to the counsellor through classes at school. Her parents are not convinced of her plans. They think she should first finish vocational school and then go to work. They are afraid that she will want to drop out of the school she doesn't like, or will want to attend university, which will be a financial burden on the family.</p>

As you can see from the examples above, one client may need help with clarifying their goal (like John, Maria and Evelina), while another has a goal and an idea of how to achieve it (like Thomas and Elena). There are also others who will only define the goal once they know the outcome of the skills audit (like Katherine and Paul).

This is why educational or career goals should be discussed with the client as well as how the skills audit will be done. Below is a list of 6 helpful points:

1. The scope of identified competences

If the client's goal is to get a job in a specific sector, you probably don't need to do a broad survey of all the competences they possess. Knowing the goal that they want to achieve, you can more easily select questions for the interview and – if need be – additional tools. The area in which potential competence gaps will be revealed may also result from the client's goal. A person who is not very good with computers and wants to work in a shoe store will probably want to know if they need to develop communication skills.

When starting an audit, a person may not yet have specific career or educational goals (as Maria's example shows). However, this doesn't mean that she doesn't have any expectations. You should discuss them and agree together on the next steps during the audit.

2. Elements of the audit

A person who needs help preparing a portfolio for a particular job application or market qualification will not necessarily want to draw up a development plan (the deadlines for submitting documents are usually short, and in this particular case, they know what to do and when to do it).

3. Size of the portfolio

A person who is doing the audit because they need as broad a diagnosis as possible may decide to gather evidence for each identified competence. In contrast, someone who wants to retrain may find this unnecessary and focus on preparing evidence of the key competences in the given field.

4. Scope and form of feedback

Feedback is the summary of the whole process, prepared by the counsellor for the person going through the audit, and should refer to the results of its different stages. The more extensive the scope of the audit, the more should be included in such a summary (and it will also take more time to prepare). Depending on the needs of the client, it may be enough to

summarise the whole process and discuss the portfolio and development plan, or it may be better to prepare written feedback summarising the work of the client on the audit.

5. Development plans

A development plan is designed to help the client achieve their goal. Typically, such a plan sets out the steps that will need to be taken in order to achieve the goal.

Sometimes the client's goal will predetermine the steps to be taken. This is the case for Katherine, who intends to apply for a specific job position. The outcome of the skills audit may help make this plan more specific (e.g. with steps to address minor competence gaps), but will not change it.

6. Number of meetings and activities done independently by the client

Each of the above activities takes time. An extensive diagnosis of competences, which will consist of a biographical interview, a behavioural interview and additional tools (e.g. the Competence Screening Tool developed by the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy), requires more meetings than determining whether the client meets the requirements contained in a job advertisement.

Gathering evidence of possessing competences may take more time if the client has decided to prepare an extensive portfolio.

Often during (or as a result of) the skills audit, the client's goal changes. The person may refine it, add to it, or abandon it altogether. This is natural and counsellors should be open to this possibility. This means, however, that the initial arrangements may have to be changed during the skills audit process.

Possible Course of the First Meeting

The first meeting is aimed at gathering basic information about the client. During this time a counsellor can:

- define the client's expectations;
- discuss the skills audit and the results it should bring;
- establish working principles (they can be written up as a contract);

- set a time frame based on the client’s goal (e.g. expected number of meetings, deadlines);
- set a date and agenda for the next meeting;
- define what the client will have to do on their own between meetings;
- start to identify competences (Box 2).

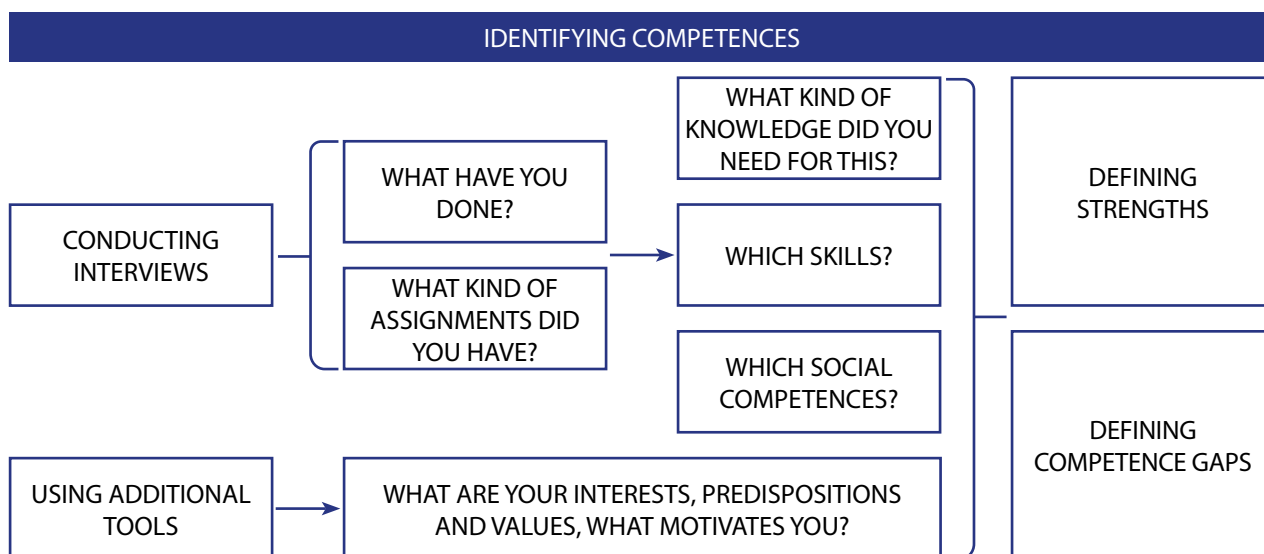
Box 2. Examples of First Meetings

<p>John (63 years old)</p>	<p>John decided to do the audit after an initial conversation with a counsellor. He briefly presented his situation and learned some basic information about the Skills Audit Method.</p> <p>The counsellor explained to him, among other things, the benefits he could derive from taking part in an audit. Together they agreed on how they will continue their work and the date and scope of the first audit meeting.</p>
<p>Thomas (45 years old)</p>	<p>Thomas spent almost the entire first meeting with the counsellor talking about his situation and setting out his expectations for the audit. He had heard various opinions about the method and wanted to verify them before making any decisions.</p> <p>The counsellor focused primarily on the benefits that Thomas could gain. He liked the idea of being able to describe competences in a language that corresponded to the content of job advertisements (Thomas likes to have everything “in writing” – he finds it more convincing).</p> <p>With this in mind, they started to plan further meetings, specifying roughly their number and what they would do during each one. Finally, the counsellor offered him a sort of homework assignment – he was to prepare a list of situations from his previous job in which he had demonstrated key – from his point of view – knowledge and skills.</p>
<p>Paul (29 years old)</p>	<p>Paul discussed his goal with the counsellor. Together they read the contents of the qualification and the requirements for assessing competences (validation). The counsellor helped him to interpret the requirements. On this basis, they agreed on the next steps, including the expected scope of the diagnosis and the form of the portfolio.</p> <p>At the same meeting, they started the biographical interview.</p>

2.2. Identifying Knowledge, Skills and Social Competence

At this stage, you help the client to determine what they already know and are able to do based on their work and non-work experiences, as well as their course of study (Fig. 2).

Figure 2. Stage of Identifying Competences



The client may do the audit for different reasons, which will strongly influence the range of competences identified or the tools used.

As a result of the audit, a person may want to define or clarify their educational and career goals. This means that they will need as broad as possible diagnosis of their competences, aptitudes, interests and values (Box 3).

Box 3. Maria’s Case

The counsellor conducted biographical and behavioural interviews with Maria. In addition, she took the “Schein’s Career Anchors” test. In order to better recognize her predispositions, the counsellor also offered her the “Key to a Career” test.

The most difficult for her was to identify specific competences in different activities (“Working at the reception desk requires having good contact with people, it’s a soft skill, isn’t it?”).

It took two meetings, but the self-reflection and discussion with the counsellor during the audit allowed Maria to recognise her values, predispositions and talents. This allowed her to narrow down the field of activity in which she would like to work.

During this stage, the counsellor recommended that Maria learn more about the reality of the labour market (on the basis of sources provided by the counsellor). She learned more about the type of positions she could apply for while still at university.

When working with a person who is aiming towards a particular goal, you will probably emphasise diagnosing the knowledge and skills that are most useful in achieving that goal (e.g. changing sectors). In such a case, you may not need to identify everything the client knows and can do (Box 4).

Box 4. Elena's Case

Elena's skills audit began with a biographical interview. She talked about the course of her education, plans and hopes for her stay in Poland and about the work at her parents' guest house.

The counsellor focused mainly on this last aspect and during this meeting moved on to the behavioural interview. Elena was questioned mainly about her responsibilities at the guest house, where she was in charge of social media, staffed the reception desk for a few hours per week and, when needed, substituted for her father to supervise the cleaning staff.

After breaking down Elena's tasks, she considered the skills required for each of them with the counsellor.

It took them another meeting, but as a result, Elena realised that running the social media of her parents' guest house required knowledge and skills that are valuable in the job market – she would be able to use them in other areas.

Between meetings, Elena took the "Schein's Career Anchors" test and searched for information about the Polish labour market (based on sources indicated by the counsellor).

At the end of this stage of the audit, they identified areas for further work and training needs. Elena learned that she would find a job more easily if she develops her teamwork and self-presentation skills. She should also improve her knowledge about organisational culture (until now, she didn't know much about dress codes, for example).

The client may also want to determine the extent to which they meet specific requirements (e.g. the competences in a job description or the learning outcomes in a qualification description). This means that a list of competences will be the starting point in this case. The counsellor's task will be to help the client to determine whether their knowledge, skills and social competence correspond to such requirements (Box 5).



However, this does not mean that other competences, which will be discovered as a result of the diagnosis, should be overlooked, especially as they can be used in different contexts (e.g. digital skills, communication skills, teamwork).

Box 5. Katherine's Case

Katherine prepared a list of situations and experiences proving that she has the competences required as listed in the job advertisement. She then sent this list to the counsellor and they discussed it in an online meeting. As a result, Katherine made sure that she had most of the required competences and could fill in the missing ones relatively quickly.

She took advantage of the help of her counsellor to clearly present the competences she possessed, crucial for the chosen position. She supported each of them with examples from her previous jobs.

To identify knowledge, skills and social competences, we propose the use of biographical and behavioural interviews (Box 6).



Biographical interview

- allows the counsellor to learn about the client's history as well as past and present experiences in different fields of life (professional, non-professional and personal);
- allows the counsellor to learn about potential areas in which to search for the knowledge, skills and social competence of the client.



Behavioural interview

- enables competences to be identified through an analysis of specific events and situations from the past;
- we recommend the use of the STAR (Situation, Task, Action, Result) model, proposing the following modifications proposed using it for SAM:¹⁰
 - » when discussing the client's activities, ask about the competences required to perform the task and ask the client to assess each competence on a scale from "lacking" to "fully developed";
 - » when discussing the results of the activities, ask the client what they learned from performing that given function or being in the given situation.

Box 6. John's Case

John thought he could only assemble buses. When asked about his skills, he would primarily mention the ones needed as a mechanic. He had heard about "soft skills", but did not pay much attention to them. He believed that a professional should first of all know how to do his job ("know how to diagnose and repair a faulty machine, know how to assemble a vehicle"). What goes beyond hard skills, he called professional experience.

The counsellor began by discussing with John his experiences in various walks of life. During the biographical interview, she asked, among other things, about his work experience, education, courses, training and qualifications, interests, social activities and knowledge of foreign languages. This took almost two meetings.

As a result, they identified several areas to focus on during the behavioural interview. This consisted of talking about John's individual activities and the competences that each required. Additionally, the counsellor asked John to use the Competence Screening Tool.

As a result, John learned that he has many non-mechanical skills (including cooking, mathematics and managing a team of several people).

¹⁰ We recommend the publication *Metody pomiaru kompetencji zawodowych* [Methods of measuring professional competences] and the podcast "Wywiad behawioralny" [Behavioural interview] for more information on the behavioural interview.

During the interviews, the counsellor and client identify what has been done so far – both in the context of work, education and hobbies. The point of reference can be a list of requirements (e.g. a job advertisement, a specific qualification). The client recalls specific situations and names the knowledge, skills and social competence they can demonstrate (or have learned) in that instance, with the counsellor's help. Depending on the client, the counsellor decides how long each interview lasts. Usually one interview smoothly transitions to the other, with no clear boundary.



The starting point of the interview can be the educational and occupational history prepared earlier by the client, i.e. a list of schools attended or jobs held, as well as other activities they were involved in as a hobby or family responsibility.



It may turn out that the client's CV or educational and professional history contains sufficient information to achieve their goal. In this case, the biographical interview may be shortened or dispensed with altogether.

Many methods and diagnostic tools (e.g. vocational aptitude tests) can be used in the audit. Their choice depends on the needs of the client and the stage of the audit being conducted (e.g. the diagnosis, the development plan).



In some cases, the client can do a self-assessment of their competences (in the context of a specific list of requirements). However, it is important to indicate the proper tools to use for this and to give guidance on how this should be done. It is always worth it for the client and counsellor to discuss the results of such a self-assessment together.



Depending on the client's needs, the skills audit may be finished at this stage.

As a result of the diagnosis, both will see the client's strengths (their competences, aptitudes). This part of the audit will also allow the counsellor to determine where the client needs more training. The goal defined at the beginning of the skills audit can be the starting point for defining competence gaps.



As a result of the competence identification stage, the client can now define, clarify or change their educational and professional goals.

As Maria's example shows, many diagnostic methods and tools can be used in a skills audit – aside from the biographical and behavioural interviews – such as, for example, tests on professional predispositions. They are chosen depending on the needs of the client.



Examples of additional diagnostic tools:

- Competence Screening Tool – tests 18 professional competences (categorised by personal, social and managerial); it is intended to be used in labour offices and Volunteer Labour Corps;
- Questionnaire on Professional Interests – a diagnostic tool that helps to identify professional interests (it has two versions, one for adults and one for youth);
- “Schein’s Career Anchor” Test – this tool identifies the areas in which a person wants to develop professionally (including motivation for working);
- personality tests;
- psychological tests;
- metaphor cards (you can use a variety of commercially available cards, for example from the Dixit game, or make your own by cutting out pictures or images from magazines);
- the lifeline exercise.

The next step is to record the results of the diagnosis (Box 7). Linking the client's experiences to the competences on the basis of the biographical and behavioural interviews makes it easier to define their knowledge, skills and social competence. Depending on the client's goals, at this point it is also worth recording other elements identified during the diagnosis, e.g. predispositions, values, talents.

How to Describe Competences

In describing competences, the main reference point will be existing standards:

- the list of requirements in job advertisements (if they refer to knowledge, skills and social competence);
- job position profiles;
- [core curricula for the occupations taught in schools](#);
- qualifications included in the [Integrated Qualifications Register](#).

Sometimes the counsellor will have to name the knowledge, skills or social competence a client presents because they are not found in any of the requirements. In such a case, it is worth remembering to:

- use clear and unambiguous wording – it should raise no doubts nor be able to be interpreted in different ways; everyone should understand it in the same way, e.g. the phrase “is ready to cooperate” can be interpreted in various ways, e.g. as “wants to cooperate now”, “knows the principles of cooperating”;
- the wording should be understandable to others – mental shortcuts and excessive generalisations should be avoided; sometimes it may be advisable to use less specialised vocabulary (especially when describing the skills useful in different sectors).

We recommend the use of operational verbs to describe competences. These are verbs that name actions, which can be observed, checked and assessed. In other words, they are used to describe activities that are intended to be measurable.

More on this topic can be found in the [Catalogue of Validation Methods](#) prepared by the Educational Research Institute.

Box 7. Elena’s Case

Elena managed the social media of her parents’ guest house. When trying to identify specific competences, she first divided the sheet into columns: knowledge, skills, social competence. She put a question mark on the last one, because she wasn’t sure if using Facebook really required them. Then she wrote down the competences required of her to do this task in very general terms (“knowledge of Facebook, Instagram, Twitter”, “computer skills”). With the help of the counsellor, she started to break down the individual entries into smaller parts and specify them further. As a result, the following competences were included in the columns:

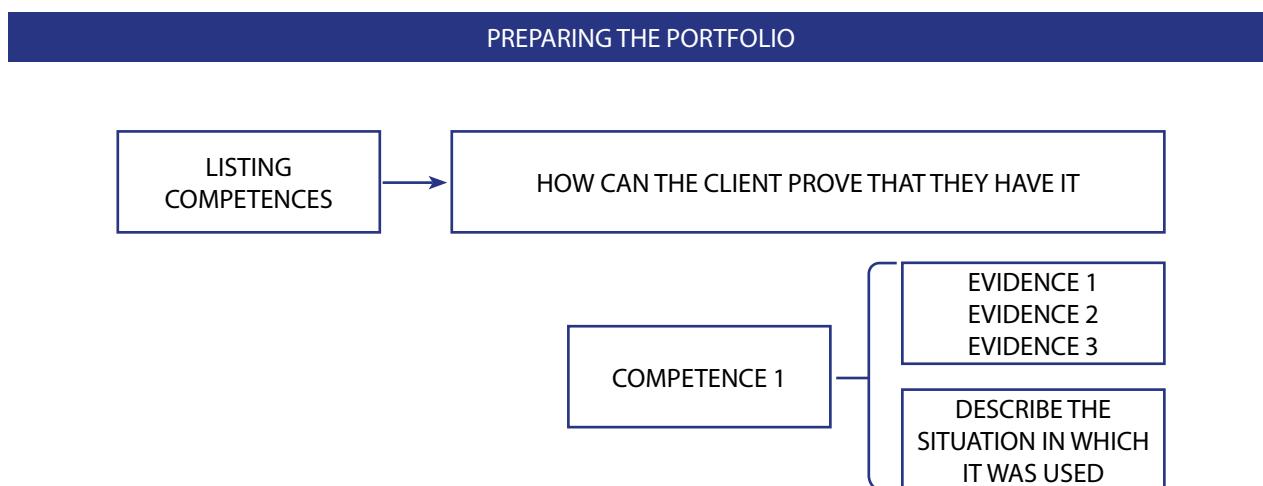
- knowledge: knowledge of etiquette rules; knowledge of Facebook, Twitter and Instagram functionalities;
- skills: editing photographic, audio and video material; creating animated gifs; translating social media terminology from English to Ukrainian; preparing posts tailored to the profile of the platform and the target audience; using Facebook, Instagram and Twitter to contact clients;
- social competence: coping with stress relating to cyberbullying; conflict resolution.

It is worth remembering that the list of competences is the basis for reflecting on what the client needs most in a given context – the most important elements can be selected from the list in terms of a given job, qualification, etc. The broader the list, the more versatile it will be in the future. It should be noted that this requires more work. Some clients will prefer to focus on one area instead of taking full stock and writing down all the competences they have acquired throughout life.

2.3. Preparing the Portfolio

An integral part of the Skills Audit Method is preparing a portfolio, i.e. a list of the client’s identified competences with the evidence of their possession (Fig. 3).

Figure 3. Stages of Preparing the Portfolio



The size of the portfolio – the number of competences you and your client decide to include and link to evidence – depends on the goal defined during the skills audit.



Preparing the portfolio

- discuss how the client can prove the competences listed in the previous step (remember that the counsellor does not evaluate the evidence gathered, but only helps to compile it);
- identify and assign evidence to each competence – this can be a list or a physical portfolio.

Why is it worthwhile to prepare a portfolio?

A counsellor recognises certain competences a person has, but cannot certify them on the basis of: “Mr. X knows Y and is able to do Z”. Moreover, if the client does not believe that they have certain competences and aptitudes, they will never consciously use them or may never develop them. Preparing a portfolio can help with this.

During this process, a person has to make a certain mental effort. They should reflect on each competence; select or describe the evidence of its possession; sometimes choose one or two best examples from several. This is often a tedious and time-consuming process. But the result is that the client is more aware of what they know and are able to do. At the same time, at the end of the audit, they have tangible proof of their competence in the form of evidence gathered in the portfolio.

Key benefits of preparing a portfolio:

- The client is strengthened and a positive psychological effect is provided

One of the key benefits of preparing a portfolio is to strengthen the client's confidence that they have specific competences and will be able to confirm this if necessary. Gathering evidence is particularly powerful in boosting self-esteem. This can be important especially for clients in a difficult professional situation (e.g. after dismissal, long-term unemployment, etc.), but also for those who do not have a very extensive professional career.

- The value of non-professional achievements is recognised

Gathering evidence with the help of a counsellor can help a client see the importance of confirming competences relating to interests or hobbies (e.g. the artistic drawings of architects), which may seem to have little value or are not valued as much as professional achievements. External confirmation that such evidence has value is important here. Without it, such evidence is often dismissed by the client.

- The client learns to talk convincingly about themselves, their competences and strengths

This is particularly important in the context of recruitment processes. If the client has prepared a portfolio, they gain confidence in the ability to confirm and explain each of the points contained in their CV.

- Forces a person to think about, organise and scan their diplomas, certificates, etc.

This is particularly useful for clients who, for example, are applying for positions published in official government sources in state institutions or in public tenders.

An additional benefit of saving documents to an electronic portfolio is having a resource of scans collected in a storage cloud. Such documents can be accessed even away from home.

- Distinctive CVs can be prepared

When working on a portfolio, the client usually does in-depth work and thinks hard about what they actually know and can do. This enables them to include the skills that really make them stand out in a CV, instead of using generic statements like “working with people” or “communication skills”.

- Future career goals are set

A client’s reflections on the evidence they have, particularly the formal documents, can help set career goals (“which skills have I been able to demonstrate in this way”; “what is the weight of the evidence I have gathered”; “in which direction can I go?”). This can provide a starting point in determining the direction of changes in their career path.

- The need to present diplomas and certificates is reviewed

Collecting different types of evidence avoids wasting time on formally confirming competences for which a person has a lot of other types of evidence (the skilful collection of informal evidence may help circumvent, for example, required postgraduate studies).

If the client is thinking about obtaining a market qualification, the evidence allows them to determine the level of their own skills. This allows them to decide how to improve their training (e.g. whether they need training or a shorter internship).

- The habit of collecting evidence on an ongoing basis is developed

Preparing a portfolio teaches a person to collect references, videos, photos of achievements, work samples, articles published in the internet, projects, written evidence of participation in training workshops, conferences or volunteer work. This prevents situations where years later, it may be difficult or impossible to obtain the evidence.

What Kind of Evidence Can Demonstrate the Competences a Person Has?

Evidence of having competences can be provided by almost any product a person has produced, as well as by the opinions of others about their competences or a description of a situation (Box 8).

Box 8. John's Case

John prepared an extensive portfolio including evidence of recognised competences.

With the help of the counsellor, he included not only certificates of completion of vocational school and various courses. He also added a detailed description of how he taught his junior colleagues to use a new tool, and the opinion of his immediate supervisor about this. He also used an excerpt from a video promoting his company at a job fair in which he demonstrated the safety testing of assembled buses (thus demonstrating his knowledge about the subject and his presentation and communication skills).



It is worth encouraging clients to create a physical portfolio (folders for paper diplomas, certificates, or a folder in the computer or the cloud for scans and other files) – so that everything is organised in one place. However, from the point of view of the counselling process, simply thinking about what evidence can prove one's competences and creating a list of them with a description serves the same function as the physical documents collected – it teaches the client to think in terms of confirming competences. It can also serve as a practical aid in recruitment processes (e.g. recalling key evidence before an interview).

It is essential that the evidence refer to specific knowledge, skills and social competence and can be shown to a third party.

Examples of evidence confirming competences include:

- work samples, e.g. technical drawings, photographs, project descriptions, reports, audio and video recordings;
- records of professional activity, e.g. notes, e-mails, timesheets;
- letters of recommendation and references from superiors, colleagues, community organisations, provided that they relate to the competences (e.g. ability to work in a team);
- reflective diaries;
- self-reflective essays;
- resumes (e.g. CV, Europass);
- information about volunteer work;
- test and examination results;
- certificates of completed courses;
- certificates, attestations, diplomas (both from formal education as well as training courses);
- degrees and diplomas.

How to Prepare a Portfolio

The starting point for preparing a portfolio is for a person to ask oneself: “How can I best demonstrate to someone else that I actually have knowledge of a particular subject / skill / social competence?” Depending on the answer, either actual evidence or descriptions of evidence are included in the portfolio. It is also useful to include a commentary on the situation in which the competence was demonstrated.

It has to be kept in mind that one piece of evidence (or description of evidence) can show that a person has more than one competence and that one competence can be accompanied by more than one piece of evidence (or description of evidence). However, it is important to clearly indicate which evidence is intended to support the given competence (Box 9).

Box 9. Paul's Case

In the process of attaining a qualification, Paul had to prepare a portfolio containing evidence of competences in organising leisure activities for youth – this is what an examiner was going to assess.

Paul completed a course in scouting on planning training activities and included the relevant certificate in the portfolio. But he is not sure which evidence could confirm that he has acquired the remaining learning outcomes.

Together with the counsellor, they came to the conclusion that it would be useful to include a description of how he had conducted several different activities with scout groups in the portfolio.

Paul added a reference from the organiser of a school trip he led around the city, called “In the Footsteps of Janusz Korczak and His Books”.

The counsellor helped him describe the documents in such a way that it was clear which competences they attested to.



Clients may disregard some evidence – especially evidence from outside of work (e.g. relating to hobbies or unpaid volunteering). It is therefore useful to discuss these on an ongoing basis.



The client decides which competences they want to support with evidence. These may be all the competences identified in the diagnosis stage, key skills in a given area or competences selected for a specific job application.

However, nothing prevents the preparation of as broad a portfolio as possible, which will be treated as an “evidence database”. Depending on the needs, during subsequent job recruitments, the client will be able to select the evidence required (during the next job

change, all that would be needed is to select a new set of competences and the history and documents ascribed to them).



Preparing a portfolio can potentially be the longest phase of work during the audit. For this reason, we recommend that this topic be presented to the client at an early stage and suggest that they begin recording competences from the very beginning of the audit. This way, even if all the competences have not yet been identified, the client can start to think about possible evidence. This may also help them to focus their thinking.

The counsellor is a consultant in this process, helping the client name specific competences. Counsellors provide clients with guidelines for describing the situation and gathering evidence. They provide information about the types of evidence that can demonstrate competence and how it can be presented to an employer, for example. However, it is the client who does most of the work at this stage.



If the aim of the client is to apply for a specific job position that requires the presentation of a portfolio, the process should concentrate on:

- following the structure of the portfolio as indicated by the employer, education provider or awarding body; if no requirements are given, the proposal in the Catalogue of Validation Methods, developed by the Educational Research Institute, may be a helpful reference;
- preparing the evidence in the required form – electronic or paper;
- collecting tangible evidence, not just their descriptions (i.e. include specific work samples in the portfolio) – unless the requirements state otherwise;
- ensure that the evidence is reasonably current.



Portfolios can be paper or electronic. If the counsellor and client decide to go digital, the [My Portfolio](#) tool can be used.

It allows the client – alone or with the help of a counsellor – to identify and write down their competences, point to the evidence confirming them and prepare a plan for further development.

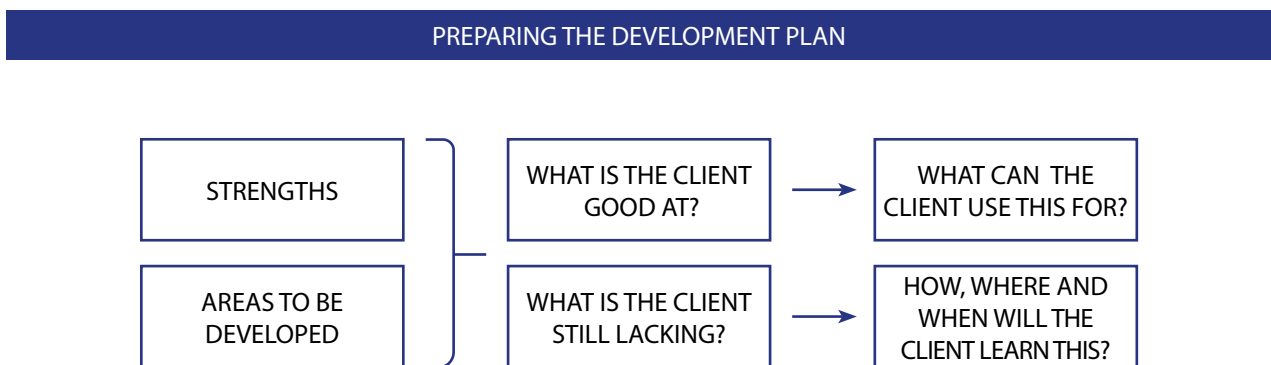
Using **My Portfolio**, the client, after identifying the competences, selecting and writing down the evidence, saves all of this in the form of files and links, in order to have it in one place. This can also be limited to just creating a list, with the actual evidence kept in another place, such as in their computer.

When preparing a portfolio, a simple **form** can be used. It is available in DOC format and can be edited to suit the client’s needs. If necessary, the form can be printed.

2.4. The Plan for Further Development and Feedback

The last step in the skills audit is preparing the development plan (Fig. 4).

Figure 4. Stage of Preparing the Development Plan



The primary purpose of the development plan is to identify step-by-step what needs to be done to put the client’s goal or goals into action (Box 10).

Box 10. Katherine’s Case

As a result of the diagnosis, it became clear that Katherine needed to master the use of a digital tool for managing the work of several teams, used in the advertising agency where she wanted to work.

There were no courses on this tool being held in the near future, but Katherine found training materials and a trial version on the Internet. She already had some experience in using similar applications (she had used Trello in her previous job). Together with the counsellor, they decided that this was a good starting point for self-study, and they spread the activities over 3 days.



The development plan:

- enables the client to achieve the goal they set when starting the skills audit or as its result (the goal may change during the course of the audit);
- addresses the client's strengths (e.g. choice of professional area) and identifies areas where they need to add to their knowledge (e.g. training, the specificity of a sector);
- should be prepared with reference to the contents of the portfolio;
- should be a written product, but it may take different forms (e.g. action map, lifeline);
- may include dates when tasks were completed or goals were achieved – to the nearest month is recommended;
- should be discussed with the client as part of the feedback process.

Why is preparing a development plan worth it?

With a development plan, the client can make optimal use of the results of the counselling process. Identifying strengths and competence gaps is only the first step. Preparing a plan helps to direct the person's thinking about how they can use their competences, as well as towards what needs to be done, in which order and when. Even if it is not possible to implement the plan, the very act of determining a path of further action makes the goals more realistic and limits "wishful thinking" about a career.

At the same time, preparing a development plan can strengthen the client – it gives them a sense of empowerment and a goal (or goals) to achieve within a set period of time.

An additional value of the development plan as part of the skills audit is that it can have an educational function. The client learns how to set goals and plan further actions during the process of preparing it.



In order for the plan to fulfil an educational role, it is helpful to explain to the client what development and career goals are.

The counsellor can give them tips on how to break big goals into smaller tasks, plan them out over time, and set "milestones".

How to Prepare a Development Plan

A development plan can be created at different stages of the skills audit. This will depend mainly on the person's goal.

When preparing the plan, it is possible to start from the list of competences made earlier. Determining what the client knows and is able to do, or not, helps in deciding the direction that may be taken. This is especially needed in the case of people who have identified their future goals only after having done the audit (for example, in the case of John or Maria).

However, it may happen that the plan is created at the beginning of the skills audit. This is usually the case when the client has such a precise goal that it is a plan in itself (as in the case of Katherine or Paul). Defining a plan at the beginning of the process helps the client focus on the resources that are important for refining or revising the goal. Such a plan can, of course, be modified and updated in relation to the resources.



A client with a specific goal (e.g. preparing to apply for a particular job) may have doubts about the value of preparing a development plan.

Plans can still be useful here – they focus on outlining a future in a chosen sector or developing a specialisation in a profession. In addition to planning for personal development, thinking about the future can have a very practical dimension. Having plans beyond “until the next interview” can help a person perform well in the process of applying for a job (for example, when asked during an interview where the client sees themselves in the future).

Whether the plan is prepared at the outset or during the audit, in preparing it, setting a goal (or goals) to achieve is valuable. These should be:

- specific – easy to understand; the wording should be unambiguous and leave no room for loose interpretation;
- measurable – formulated in such a way that it is possible to quantify the degree to which the goal is achieved or to allow for unambiguous confirmation of their achievement;
- achievable – overly ambitious goals undermine confidence in reaching them and therefore the motivation to achieve them;
- meaningful – they should be an important step forward, but at the same time, they must provide a specific value for the person who will implement them;

- time-bound – each goal should have a precise time horizon within which the client intends to achieve it.

Goals can be developmental – focused on bridging the gap between what is and what the client wants to achieve (e.g. gaining knowledge about a topic, mastering a language at a higher level). Goals can also be educational (e.g. choosing a school or training course) or professional (e.g. changing jobs).

Next, it is worth breaking down the main, long-term goal into detailed (operational) and smaller actions that lead to their achievement (Individual Action Plans are prepared following a similar principle). The actions can be visualised by placing them on a timeline (Box 11).

Box 11. Maria's Case

Maria is studying international relations. With the help of SAM and her work with the counsellor, she plans to search for employment in international trade with China. With this goal in mind, she has laid out her development plan on a timeline.



Breaking down the main goal into intermediate steps is especially important for clients who are “wishful thinkers” about their career. Breaking down the process will help them visualise how many actions need to be taken in order to achieve the goal.

When creating or revising a plan, you can review the competences diagnosed during the skills audit and verify initial ideas. It is worth considering: what is feasible for the client, the foundation that they already have, and what further career direction is indicated by their resources. A review of competences in this case can strengthen the client and show them that they have the basis to implement the scenario they have set.

When writing the development plan, consider the time frame in which the goal is to be achieved. A specific date is not necessary – setting a month is sufficient. This time may be subject to change. However, it should be set in advance as something to strive towards – this helps to make the goal realistic. The plan can also include intermediate goals with actions to

be taken. It is useful to place the specific goals of the plan on a single timeline. This helps to identify and learn how achieving different goals can affect each other.



The development plan can be prepared with the use of the My Portfolio digital tool, the editable **form** or one's own materials (the simplest version is to draw the timeline on a piece of paper and enter the goals and actions together with the dates to achieve them).

2.5. Summarising the Skills Audit

The skills audit should end with a summary of all the stages and work the client has done with the support of the counsellor. The feedback can be verbal or written. How detailed it will be depends on the approach of the counsellor or career coach. The timing of the summary and discussion depends on the individual case – it can occur after each stage of the skills audit. Be sure to discuss both the timing and form of the skills audit summary with the client at the beginning of the process so that they know what to expect.

3. Using the Skills Audit Method Beyond the Labour Office

You already know what the particular stages of a skills audit look like. You know what its benefits can be. You know the principles to follow. Below we present additional contexts in which the Skills Audit Method can be applied.

3.1. Using SAM in Working with Youth in School

Seventh and eighth grade primary school pupils and secondary school students are faced with making choices about their future educational and vocational path.



The Skills Audit Method can be used to support them in clarifying their interests, identifying their strengths and areas that need additional work. This will help them to define their goals and make informed decisions about further education or entry into the labour market (Box 12).

In such cases, the role of the counsellor is to:

- help pupils to define their educational and vocational goals or to make them more realistic (e.g. by comparing their ideas about a certain type of work with information about employers' expectations);
- identify strengths, talents and the potential of a young person;
- advise on the types of work in which they can use their competences;
- support them in planning activities that will make it possible to achieve their planned goals – first of all in choosing the appropriate educational path (this can be done, for example, by proposing various ways of acquiring the necessary competences).

Using the audit in working with youth can also be conducted during lessons with the guidance counsellor. The main aim of such lessons is to raise pupils' awareness of lifelong learning. In this context, it is important to combine a diagnosis of strengths and weaknesses with information about the labour market (e.g. overcoming stereotypes, providing information about different sectors) and to show learning as a process that takes place not only at school.

Box 12. Evelina's Case

Sixteen-year-old Evelina is in her second year of vocational secondary school specialising in culinary arts, but it is becoming increasingly clear that this school is not for her.

She first heard about the Skills Audit Method during homeroom class. The counsellor who conducted the activities sent detailed information to all the students and their parents, including contact details and information on how to make an appointment. As she is a minor, Evelina went to the first meeting with her father, who had to sign a permission slip for her to participate in the skills audit

Group work can be used in such classes. In working with young people, the kinds of tasks and situations in which they feel comfortable and which motivate them to act should be identified.



When diagnosing competences, it is worth using conversation (interviews) first.

It is also possible to:

- use assessments made by people in the student's social environment (360 degree assessment);
- create situations in which the young people will be able to demonstrate their competences (e.g. role plays).

In working with youth, you can also:

- show them the possibilities offered by thinking about goals, and in this context, show them what the skills audit can be used for and how they can use it themselves in the future (Box 13);
- refer to situations from their lives and communities;
- prepare assignments relating to the diagnosed competences, e.g. "teach grandma how to use a computer" and present them as a "mission" or "challenge" instead of "homework";
- use visuals (e.g. a lifeline) and materials rich in pictures and diagrams;
- make them aware of the path to their desired goal (this is the function of a development plan).

Box 13. What Happened in the Stage of Diagnosing Evelina's Competences

The counsellor gave Evelina a Career Interest Questionnaire to help her think about the type of work she would like to do in the future. The result showed that she would enjoy working with tools, machines or technical devices, as well as directing others and looking for innovations and new solutions.

The counsellor then moved on to the elements of the behavioural interview, asking Evelina about what she does in and out of school, what she is good at and what she finds difficult. It turned out that she often repairs various appliances at home and likes to take them apart to see how they work. She does not like her vocational subjects at school, but rather prefers computer science and mathematics, although she has no patience for studying the latter and her grades are not the best.

Before the next meeting, Evelina had to ask a few people from her social environment about her strengths. The counsellor gave her a list of qualities as supportive material.



An important factor in working with youth is the involvement of their parents. They have to give permission for their children to work with the counsellor, they can also participate in the process. They will benefit from the knowledge gained in this process, as the results of the audit will make it easier for them to support and advise their children in making future decisions.



It takes several meetings to conduct an audit with young people. There will be 4 to 6 meetings on average, depending on how the work goes, as well as on how many things the student can do on their own or with support.

It is good to keep to a set and relatively fixed schedule, but allow for flexibility in terms of the form of the meetings and tools used.

When determining the duration of the whole process, you can add time for meetings with parents after the audit (to discuss the results together) or before (to present the method, and then possibly taking time to decide whether the child will work with the counsellor). The whole process can take about 2 months.

There should be close to a 2-week break between meetings. This will allow the students to complete simple tasks on their own and give them time for reflection (Box 14). Nothing prevents doing some of the work at home. However, the results should be discussed during the meeting.

Box 14. The Results of Using SAM in Evelina's Case

As a result of her work with the counsellor, Evelina decided to attend university. She understood that achieving her goal (getting a well-paid job) is worth the several-years investment, if this will give her the chance to do something she likes. In the meantime, she can use what she already knows to support herself during her studies without burdening the family budget.

Evelina realises that although she is not keen on culinary arts school, she is gaining skills there that could come in handy for casual work. Moreover, the small repairs she does at home and in her uncle's workshop are also a source of developing useful competences.

Organising her competences and creating a development plan also gave Evelina specific arguments to convince her parents of the path she has chosen.

3.2. Using SAM in Higher Education

The Skills Audit Method can help define the knowledge, skills and social competence a person has, as well as describe them in the language of learning outcomes.



The audit can be used in the process of confirming learning outcomes (an alternative path of gaining entry to higher education in Poland for persons with professional experience).

A university staff member can use biographical and behavioural interviews to determine the competences an applicant has. This is particularly useful for persons who have acquired a large part of their knowledge and skills at work.

Making a list of competences enables them to be compared with the learning outcomes of a study programme.

As part of the audit, an applicant can also prepare a portfolio with the evidence of the required learning outcomes (with the support of a university staff member or by using the "My Portfolio" online tool made available by IBE). This can facilitate a committee's decision on admitting the person to the university. Moreover, if the decision is positive, selected subjects or their modules can be recognised, and a number of ECTS credits can be awarded towards the degree. An additional advantage in this case is that the process is documented without the need for additional forms.



The Skills Audit Method can be used by counsellors in academic career bureaus in their work with university students and graduates.

In this case, a particular advantage of using the skills audit is the preparation of a portfolio, which can be used when applying for different jobs, as well as a development plan.



Taking stock with students may require several meetings. It is advisable to keep a set and relatively fixed schedule, but to allow flexibility with regard to the form of the meetings and the tools used.



You can consider using the skills audit with persons who have just entered university to help them prepare a development plan while they are studying.

3.3. Using SAM for Job Recruitments

The skills audit can be used during internal and external job recruitments.



To make optimal use of the skills audit, the employer should describe the knowledge, skills and social competence required for the given job position.

The Skills Audit Method can be used in:

- the written application phase

The candidate does the skills audit in the context of the requirements specified in the job advertisement. This allows them to indicate in their application which requirements are met or which competences they have. If they prepared a portfolio, they can provide evidence for their possessed knowledge and skills (e.g. diplomas, descriptions of experiences, descriptions of successes, situations, tasks performed).

- the oral recruitment phase

The recruiter assesses the candidate during the job interview. This may be based on the skills audit results (described, e.g. in the CV) or the portfolio presented in the written application phase.



In addition to the interview, a recruiter can also use tests, simulations, an Assessment Centre and other tools used in HR.

▪ summary phase

At this point, feedback can be given to the candidate. It is useful to include the basis for offering the job to the candidate or rejecting them (referring to the specific competences required).



The results of a skills audit can be used as a starting point to define a company's training needs.

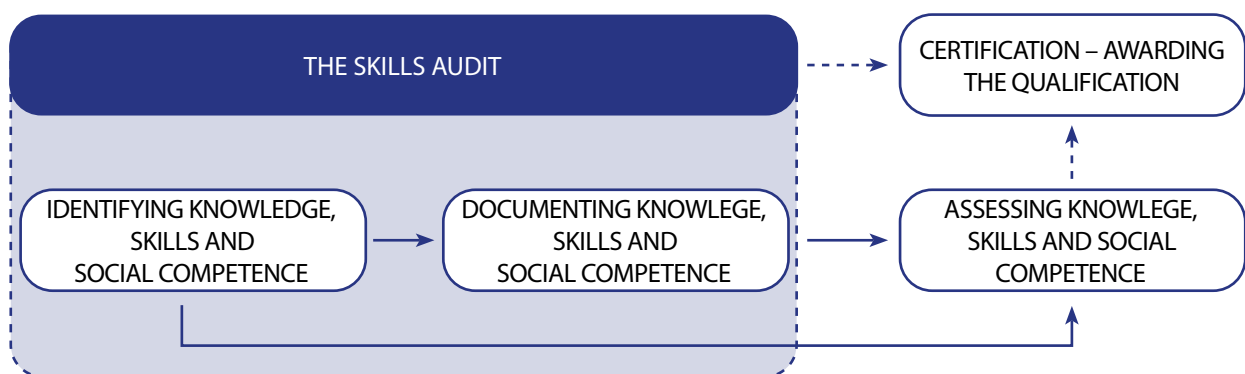
Using the skills audit does not significantly lengthen the recruitment process. It allows a company to focus on the actual knowledge, skills and social competence of a job applicant instead of their previous educational and professional history.

3.4. Using SAM in the Validation of Learning Outcomes

Validation is confirming that the person applying for a particular qualification (diploma or certificate) has the required knowledge, skills and social competence. How and where the learning took place is irrelevant in this case.

Validation in Poland takes place in three stages: identification, documentation and assessment of learning outcomes (Fig. 5).

Figure 5. Stages of Validation and How the Skills Audit Is Incorporated in This Process



As part of the **Integrated Qualifications System** (IQS), authorised institutions can award market qualifications – i.e. diplomas and certificates, developed by business entities. In order to attain a qualification, a validation process must be successfully completed.



A skills audit can be the first step in the validation process. It allows the knowledge, skills and social competence of a validation candidate to be identified. It also allows evidence of these competences to be gathered.

If the competences identified by the audit correspond to those required for the qualification, the client can decide whether they should go through the validation process.

Descriptions of Market Qualifications

Descriptions of market qualifications in the IQS are based on their learning outcomes, which describe the knowledge, skills and social competence required to perform the tasks of a given qualification. In this material, for the purpose of simplifying the language, we are calling learning outcomes “competences”. If the aim of doing a skills audit is to confirm competences and attain a market qualification, then the starting point should be the description of the qualification available in the Integrated Qualifications Register. When writing down the competences of a client, the counsellor should compare them with the learning outcomes included in the qualification’s description. In this case, special attention should be paid to the language and use of operational verbs (e.g. “characterise the principles of occupational health and safety at work”).

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Websites

Good Practices Database of Validation and Quality Assurance: <http://walidacja.ibe.edu.pl/dobrepraktyki/en/>

Knowledge Database on the Integrated Qualifications System: <https://kwalifikacje.edu.pl/baza-wiedzy/?lang=en>

Catalogue of Validation Methods: <http://walidacja.ibe.edu.pl/metody/en/>

Małopolski Pociąg do Kariery: <https://kierunek.pociagdokariery.pl/artykul/Bilans-Kariery>

Integrated Qualifications Register: <https://kwalifikacje.gov.pl/en/k>

Skills Audit Method: <https://mbk.ibe.edu.pl>

