

**Good practice
in validation of learning outcomes**

Poland

**Recognition of learning outcomes for
admission to higher education**



Good practise in validation of learning outcomes. Poland. Recognition of learning outcomes for admission to higher education

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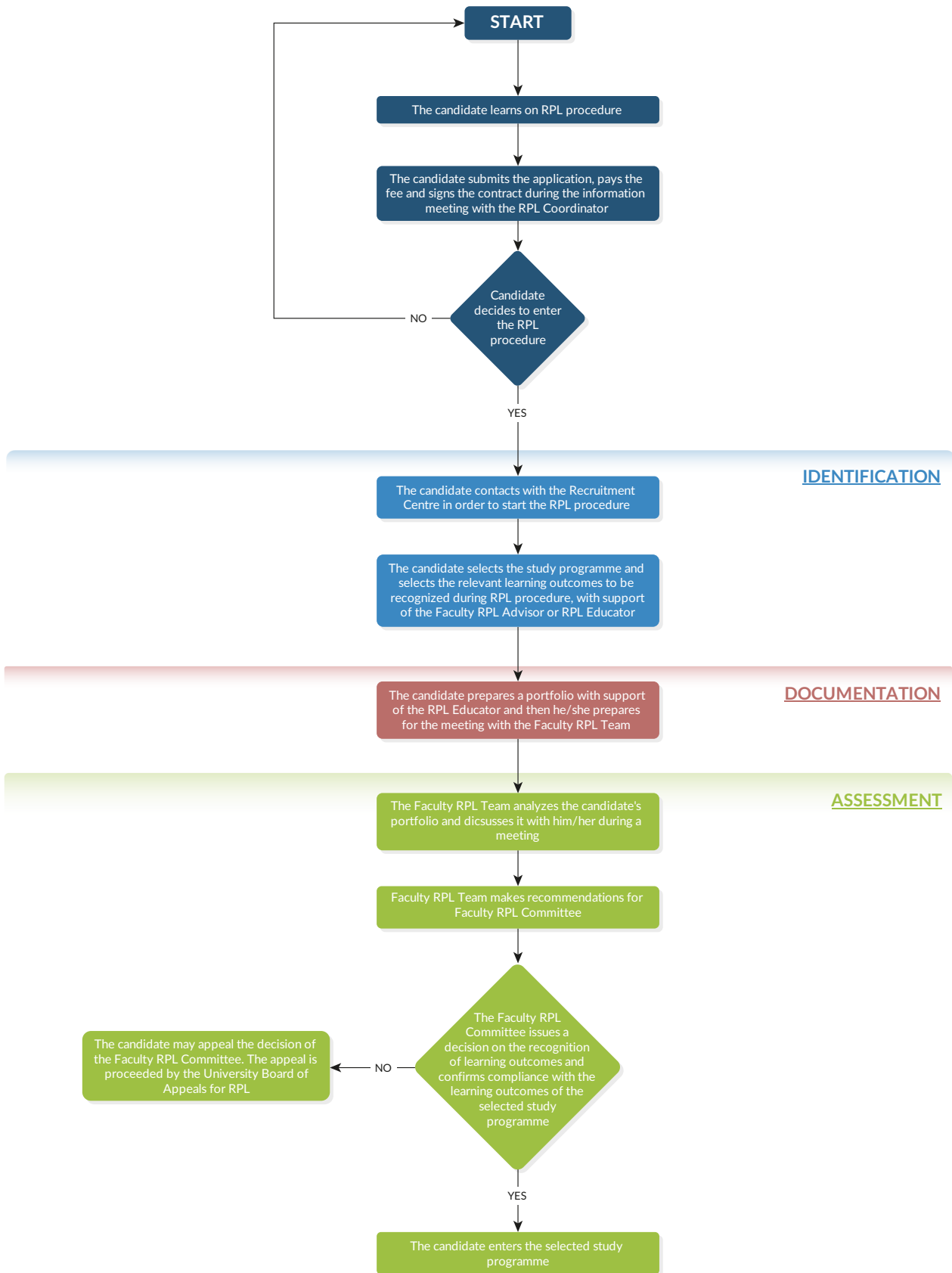
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1. Country, institution name

- Poland
- Dolnośląska Szkoła Wyższa we Wrocławiu (University of Lower Silesia in Wrocław)

2. Institution website

<http://www.dsw.edu.pl>

3. Qualifications

This good practice is about recognizing learning outcomes for the purpose of admission to studies rather than obtaining a specific qualification.

As part of existing legal regulations, the University of Lower Silesian in Wrocław conducts a process of recognition of learning outcomes (RPL) for the following study programmes:

- pedagogy
- special education
- journalism and public communication
- administration
- national security
- geodesy and cartography

4. Short description of the validation process

The University of Lower Silesian in Wrocław (ULS) developed procedures enabling student admissions through the recognition of learning outcomes (RPL) for licentiate and master degree studies. Together with all other higher education institutions in Poland, it had to introduce such measures under the Act of 11 July 2014 amending the Act – Higher Education Law and certain other acts.

RPL allows a maximum of 50% of the number of ECTS credits allocated to a particular field of study to be recognised using this procedure.

The procedure for the recognition of learning outcomes takes place in several steps:

- **an information meeting** is held, where the candidate submits his/her application, pays a one-time fee and signs a contract;
- **the PLR procedure is initiated** when the candidate contacts the Recruitment Office, meets with the university's RPL coordinator and the Faculty RPL Advisor (additional meeting);
- **the candidate's application is analysed** before members of the Faculty Validation Team for the Assessment of Learning Outcomes (hereinafter the Faculty Validation Team) for the field of study, appointed by the dean, who determine the actions a candidate will have to take, including the selection of learning outcomes, choice of study programme and portfolio preparation;
- **an assessment is performed**, consisting of an analysis of the actions taken and materials submitted by the candidate as well as a meeting with the Faculty Validation Team;
- **a decision is issued** by the University RPL Commission, which is preceded by the preparation of a recommendation by the Faculty Validation Team and payment of the fee by the candidate;
- **studies are begun** – the candidate makes a decision on starting studies after being informed of the decision.

5. Detailed description of the validation process

Obtaining information about the possibility of using the RPL procedure is the first step in the validation process. Information is available from the website or the staff of the Recruitment Office at the University. Interested persons should apply for the RPL procedure, sign a contract and pay an administrative fee.

5.1. Identification of learning outcomes

When starting to identify learning outcomes, the candidate contacts the Faculty RPL Advisor or personal RPL Educator, who provide support in choosing the most suitable study programme offered at the university, identifying relevant learning outcomes that can be included in the RPL procedure and preparing the portfolio. The meetings have the character of career guidance.

The candidate considers the following criteria when deciding which study programme offered by the university is most suitable:

- the study programme,
- the professional experience gained,
- career plans,
- labour market demands and its possible changes,
- the applicable regulations for specific professions.

When selecting the learning outcomes that can be included in a RPL procedure and, at the same time, the subjects in a given study programme, the candidate must identify the learning outcomes which are in the study programme and which he/she believes have already been achieved through non-formal or informal learning. To this end, the following are analysed:

- the learning outcomes for the given field of study,
- the studies plan,
- the portfolio developed by the candidate.

The purpose of indicating achieved learning outcomes is to stimulate reflection on the candidate's learning process and, most importantly, to build the links between the academic world and practice. In a model RPL process, this is the stage of summarising the candidate's educational and professional biography and is intended to make the candidate aware of the range of skills that have been acquired in life.

5.2. Documentacion of learning outcomes

The aim of the documentation stage is to prepare the portfolio. The candidate must analyse his/her experiences and indicate the knowledge, skills and social competence he/she has.

The portfolio may include among others:

- diplomas, certificates;
- employer recommendations;
- descriptions of work undertaken, records of professional activity and, if necessary, samples of work, elements required for a given profession, e.g. lesson plans, diagnoses of children – while complying with confidentiality regulations, etc;
- audio and video materials, e.g. a video showing the candidate's work.

In documenting the learning outcomes, the candidate works closely with the Faculty RPL Advisor or the personal RPL Educator. They provide much support in explaining the terms used in the description of the study programmes so that the candidate fully understands them.

The evidence of knowledge, skills and social competences and the form in which they will be included in the portfolio is determined by predefined requirements.

5.3. Assessment of learning outcomes

The prepared portfolio is sent to the Faculty Validation Team. Its members will read the portfolio's contents and, if they consider it appropriate, ask the candidate to supplement the information with additional elements. If this is not needed, the Team meets the candidate, which is a key element of the RPL procedure.

During the meeting, candidates:

- discuss their professional and educational experiences;
- explain their motivation for applying to the RPL procedure and for wanting to be admitted to the study programme;
- answer questions from members of the Team.

The meeting is not an examination. At ULS, much attention is paid to the course of the meeting or the questions asked, e.g. candidates are asked to reflect on a given issue, the way they understand a given phenomenon or to solve a problem situation.

Team members must keep in mind three essential principles:

- The principle of flexibility and individual approach – Team members are selected in terms of their competences so that they best match the experience gained by the candidate;
- The principle of social responsibility – Team members are obliged to take into account the profile of the student and university graduate as well as the quality of education provided at the university; application of this principle involves ethical responsibility for the decisions made;
- The principle of trust in the competences of Team members and (limited) trust in the candidate: trust in the competences of Team members refers to not undermining their legitimate opinions, while (limited) trust in the candidate refers, among others, to limiting the possibility of recognising more learning outcomes than is justified and sensitising team members to attempts at coercion in this respect.

It is worth adding that in justified cases, representatives of the socio-economic community can take part in the procedure, in addition to university staff. This is decided by the dean, who invites them to take part, provided that they have at least 10 years of experience in the sector relating to the field of study for which the RPL procedure is being conducted.

Through discussion and work on the collected evidence confirming the candidate's achievement of the specified learning outcomes, Team members decide which ones are recognised and sign the official report.

5.4. Certification

This procedure does not include issuing certificates.

Meetings of the Faculty Validation Team are concluded with the preparation of **recommendations for the recognition of specific learning outcomes and confirmation of their correspondence with learning outcomes for a given field, level and profile of studies**.

On their basis, the Academic RPL Committee issues a decision on the recognition of the learning outcomes specified in the recommendation, acquired outside the formal system of studies, and confirms their correspondence with the learning outcomes for the given field, level and profile of studies chosen by the candidate.

6. Validation methods

The main validation methods used at the University of Lower Silesia in Wrocław are:

- analysis of evidence and statements collected in a portfolio prepared by the candidate;
- unstructured interview of the candidate conducted by the Faculty Validation Team.

Other methods, such as presentation, are also possible. However, this depends on the candidate's specificity

and experience and the programme of studies and specialisations he/she is applying for, as well as the requirements of the Team members. ULS has not developed separate RPL tools, although they clearly see a need for this.

7. Validation results

The RPL procedure ends with the recognition of the candidate's learning outcomes achieved outside the formal education system and the confirmation of their correspondence with the learning outcomes for the field, level and profile of study. In practice, specific subjects from the programme of study are indicated, which can be recognised on the basis of the RPL procedure.

The candidate will be informed if at any stage of the procedure a negative decision is made, e.g. the formal requirements for a sufficient number of years of experience are not met.

8. Human resources

Several functions are performed in the RPL procedure at the University of Lower Silesia in Wrocław. Each has its own specific requirements, relating to the tasks for which it is responsible in this process.

- The **University RPL Coordinator** should have knowledge of the law and study programmes offered by the university and should also have communication skills. This function is usually performed by a person working in the Recruitment Office.
- The **Faculty RPL Advisor** should have excellent knowledge of the study programmes offered by the faculty.
- The RPL **Educator** should have knowledge of the study programmes and the competence to provide guidance and support. The Educator acts as a link between the candidate and the members of the Faculty Validation Team and is the candidate's counsellor and mentor during the process. He/she may or may not participate in the meeting of the Team with the candidate.

In addition, all persons involved in the RPL procedure are required to have:

a) in the area of knowledge:

- substantive preparation and specialisation in the field of study applied for by the candidate;
- knowledge about the specific characteristics of the RPL, as well as about non-formal education and informal learning;
- knowledge about the study programme;

b) in the area of skills:

- the ability to analyse the practical manifestations of having achieved specific learning outcomes;
- the ability to use knowledge flexibly;
- the ability to apply knowledge to practice;
- interpersonal skills;

c) in the area of social competence

- the ability to adapt the language of his/her responses to the candidate;
- an open attitude towards the candidate and the various ways of acquiring learning outcomes.

The staff persons participating in the procedure must have at least 5 years of professional experience in higher education. The representatives of the social and economic community invited to participate in the RPL procedure should have at least 10 years of experience in the sector relating to the field of study in which the RPL procedure is being conducted.

9. Organizational and material conditions

The technical and physical conditions needed to perform the RPL procedure is determined by the specificities of the field of study concerned. In each case, however, the following resources are required:

- a room for meetings with the Faculty RPL Advisor or the RPL Educator and the Faculty Validation Team;
- computer with a printer and Internet access (printout of study programmes, communication with the candidate);
- computer equipment for video playback and use of various applications.

For studies in the social sciences listed above, these resources suffice. The specificity of studies such as national security or geodesy and cartography may require additional aids, such as access to specialised software or technical equipment. However, at ULS, neither of these two fields have yet been the subject of a RPL procedure and detailed requirements for them have not been developed.

The RPL procedure is time consuming. It can take several months from the time a person applies to the start of studies. The process is even longer if the application is submitted at the beginning of summer holidays when fewer academic staff are available.

From the candidate's point of view, it is best if the procedure ends when the new academic year begins, i.e. when classes start for the studies to which the student can be admitted through the RPL procedure. Because candidates often appear at the end of the recruitment process, e.g. in September, it sometimes happens that the person who becomes a student after passing through the RPL procedure starts to attend regular classes in the summer semester, in an individual study mode.

10. Quality assurance

The quality assurance of the RPL procedure is in line with the university's education quality assurance and monitoring systems at both the university and faculty level. These systems include:

- monitoring the implementation of the RPL procedure;
- analysing the availability and transparency of information on the learning process and RPL procedure;
- developing institutional and personal networks of links with the socio-economic and international community;
- developing, monitoring and improving procedures;
- developing, evaluating and continuously improving study concepts and programmes;
- organising and implementing the learning process;
- monitoring and evaluating the learning process in specific fields of study;
- monitoring and evaluating learning outcomes throughout the entire learning process.

Monitoring the quality of the implementation of the RPL procedure is continuous and takes place on the basis of mutual trust and mutual quality control. An important role in the quality assurance of the RPL procedure is played by the Faculty RPL Advisor, who is responsible for selecting appropriate, competent members of the Faculty Validation Team and the RPL Educator – whose task is to ensure that the procedure is understandable to the candidates and that the quality of the entire process is maintained.

The internal evaluation of RPL is performed by two faculty collegial bodies:

- the Curriculum Council for the field of study in which the RPL procedure is conducted, and
- The Faculty Commission for the Quality of Education, responsible for the annual summary of the process of achieving learning outcomes during the implementation of study programmes in respective fields of study.

Both bodies analyse the quality of the RPL procedure and the documentation collected.

External evaluation of the RPL procedure most often takes place at the time when the quality of education in

particular fields of study is evaluated by the Evaluation Teams of the Polish Accreditation Committee. The quality of the procedure and its documentation is then evaluated.

10.1. Appeals Procedure

The candidate has the right to appeal the decision to recognise his/her learning outcomes if he/she does not agree with the decision of the RPL Faculty Commission. The appeal procedure is handled by the University Board of Appeals for RPL, which decides on the compliance of the RPL process with the law and university regulations. Should they find a discrepancy in complying with the regulations, the Board annuls the appealed decision and sends the case back to the RPL Faculty Commission for reconsideration.

11. Financing

The costs of the RPL procedure at the University of Lower Silesian in Wrocław are fully covered by the candidates. If they want to obtain support from their employer or benefit from a grant, they can do so, but on their own. The University does not act as an intermediary.

The costs of the procedure vary according to the number of recognised learning outcomes and the subjects to be recognised on this basis. The costs of the RPL procedure depend on the number of ECTS points allocated to the subjects to be recognised in this procedure. The ULS has developed a formula for calculating the costs of the RPL procedure, with ECTS credits grouped in certain price ranges:

Formula for calculating the cost of RPL at the University of Lower Silesia in Wrocław	
Number of ECTS	Cost
One-time administrative fee	
41% – 50%	2500 PLN
31% – 40%	2000 PLN
21% – 30%	1500 PLN
11% – 20%	1000 PLN
10% or less	500 PLN

Table 1. Based on the work of A. Bilon and B. Minty: *Potwierdzenie efektów uczenia się pozaformalnego i nieformalnego w Dolnośląskiej Szkole Wyższej we Wrocławiu. Studium przypadku* [Recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes at the University of Lower Silesia. Case study]

12. Context of good practice

The University of Lower Silesian in Wrocław – like any other university in Poland – has the right to recruit students using the RPL procedure and is required to develop such a procedure under the Act of 11 July 2014 amending the Act – Law on Higher Education and certain other acts.

ULS adopted the principle that the RPL is not only an admissions procedure but also an educational process in itself, based on the biographical learning and supported reflection done by the candidates.

The procedure developed at the University is based on research conducted by academic staff within the EDUPRO project – *Promotion of Lifelong Learning in Higher Education through the implementation of innovative practices for the recognition of learning outcomes achieved outside formal education* (Project No: 2014-1-PL01-KA203-003629) in Portugal and the United Kingdom. Its implementation has allowed the University to develop several analyses and recommendations, available on the website: <http://www.edupro.dsw.edu.pl/>.

The adoption of this practice implies a number of important principles which guide ULS staff during the procedure:

- an orientation on quality;
- the principle of balancing the support offered to candidates during the process so that it is consistent with the principles of providing assistance;
- the principle of a personalised approach and required flexibility.

However, the RPL process structured in this way has certain weaknesses and aspects that need to be improved. These include the time consuming nature of the procedure and the risk of too much flexibility. ULS is taking steps to speed up the RPL procedure while not losing sight of the specificity and nature of the process itself.