

Recognition of Non-formal and Informal Learning Outcomes: The Use of an Organizational Model in Practice of Universities in Poland

RAFAL DREWNIK

Department of Management of Organizational Innovations
Faculty of Management, UTP University of Science and Technology, Bydgoszcz, Poland
Email: rafal.drewniak@utp.edu.pl
Tel: +48600241816

GRAZYNA VOSS

Department of Organization and Management
Faculty of Management, UTP University of Science and Technology, Bydgoszcz, Poland
Email: grazyna.voss@utp.edu.pl
Tel: +48691372808

Abstract

Recognition of the knowledge gained through informal and non-formal education is one of the key aspects of higher education in Poland. This issue is of interest to the European institutions for many years. There are no procedures, and legal developments in this field in Poland. Although non-formal education is largely autonomous matter of each country, it also has its European level. European institutions are actively working to develop transnational standards of conduct in education, which could stimulate sectors of formal and informal learning. The purpose of this article is to present the organizational model of informal and non-formal recognition of learning outcomes. The research project was carried out two empirical studies to determine the needs and possibilities of implementation in Poland recognition of learning outcomes of non-formal and informal learning in higher education. The first one was a survey conducted among students of management, and the other one was the focus group interview conducted among candidates for higher education. The study also extended interviews with experts and employers. The main objective of this study was to develop and implement a comprehensive model of the recognition of the effects of non-formal and informal learning in higher education, including the legal, organizational and tool model. Organizational model provides a description of the procedure of recognition of learning outcomes for university candidates on the basis of the available and documented learning outcomes (in the case of non-formal) and/or declared/notified (in the case of non-formal education). The description of the organizational procedure of recognition presented in the article attempts the necessary sequence of actions under this procedure. This characteristic allows to arranging the whole process and an indication of the organizational units responsible for the implementation of the various stages in the model. There are also presented a proposal documents that should be developed, made or issued at different stages of the process.

Key Words: Knowledge Recognition, Learning Outcomes, Organizational Model, Non-Formal and Informal Learning.

Introduction

Recognition of non-formal learning outcomes allows candidate to study in accordance with their profession, in order to expand their existing learning outcomes and acquire the missing knowledge and

social skills assigned to a particular study field. The process of recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is related to legal regulations implemented by the European Union, as recommended by the EU Council of 05.09.2012¹. On the basis of these recommendations, the Polish regulations (the Higher Education Act) have made the universities establish recognition of learning outcomes of Polish universities since 2015. The process of recognizing effects of non-formal and informal learning will be applied for the candidates for first-degree studies having 5 years of professional experience, and for candidates for second-degree studies having 3 years of professional experience². This means that the graduates of the first-degree studies should have a three year break in education so that they can be re-included in the recognition process at the second-degree studies. In addition, this process can be implemented by both public and private institutions who meet the conditions of the Law on Higher Education (positive assessment of the Polish Accreditation Commission or the right to confer the title of doctor in a given field of study).

In order to develop the model of learning outcomes recognition at the Higher School of Banking in Gdansk, a group of experts conducted a study among:

- Teaching staff and university authorities (from 10 Polish universities - 5 public and 5 private),
- Employers (those being part of the Program Council - consulting the timetables for substantive and practical angles)
- Students (1000 students from 15 public and private universities in Poland, first year of management studies).

The following methods were used:

- Interviews and discussion panels - as an expert method, case study (teaching staff and academic authorities),
- Surveys and observation (students),
- The Delphi method (the employers).

Based on studies conducted during the period from October 2012 to June 2014, a group of experts developed the recognition model for outcomes of non-formal and informal learning. Based on this research, a list of benefits arising from the recognition process has been created; these benefits are divided into three groups:

For Students

- To encourage those who work to start their education, by providing a more flexible study program (less time destined for the implementation of classes and also less time needed to prepare for the exams)
- The possibility of increasing formal education,
- Opening up new career prospects,
- Not repeating what is already known (saving time)
- Greater opportunities to engage time for new knowledge and skills.

For the University

- To develop uniform procedures for the recognition of the university in all fields of education,
- A combination of the effects of formal and informal learning,

¹ Recommendation of European Union Council on the validation of non-formal learning and informal learning (2012/C 398/01); Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning life (23.04.2008).

² Act of 11.07.2014 amending the Law on Higher Education and other acts : Journal of Laws from 2014. Pos. 1198, art. 170d (11.07.2014).

- Strengthening the position of the university and the impact on the process of lifelong learning,
- Creating homogeneous groups of students - all students start at the primary level (no need to connect the basic level, intermediate and advanced)
- Promoting the university.

For Employers

- Increasing the availability of the employee through reduced time commitment to the study,
- Employee training by completing the necessary skills and qualifications,
- Employee motivation through education.

In addition, the model has been tested on 20 candidates who have prepared and submitted the necessary documents certifying the learning outcomes achieved by non-formal education. The testing process allowed a positive verification of the documents of 15 candidates, which enabled recognition of learning outcomes in the selected subjects. The domains that have been accepted most often are: accounting, financial reporting and management framework.

The above actions made it possible to verify the model of recognition as a "reference model", with the possibility of direct implementation in universities (public and non-public).

The aim of this article is to present a universal model of organizational recognition of non-formal and informal learning, which corresponds to legal requirements and expectations of the university and the candidates.

The Procedure of Recognition of the Learning Outcomes in the Non-Formal and Informal Systems - A Model Approach

The process of recognizing the effects of non-formal/informal education and collection of proof of knowledge, skills and social competences of the candidates requires relevant information, which means the need to establish clear criteria and standards.

The organizational model provides description of the procedure of recognition of learning outcomes of candidates on the basis of documented learning outcomes (in the case of non-formal) and / or declared / notified (in the case of non-formal education).

The following table presents a description of the organization of the procedure of recognition attempting to systematize and formalize the necessary sequence of actions under this procedure. This characteristic allows arranging the whole process and indicating organizational units responsible for the implementation of the various stages in the model. Also presented is a proposal of documents that should be developed, made or issued at different stages of the process.

Some work schedule is proposed including time for certain actions within the model. This description was also enhanced by organizational chart - presenting graphically succession of individual steps and action recognition process - and an example of its course schedule.

In addition, special attention should be paid to the manual prepared for the candidates, which includes the basic information on how to prepare appropriate documentation (application model, self-esteem sheet and an example sheet of a certificate attesting the effects of formal education obtained during the employment).

The proposed description of the procedure for recognition of the organizational model of learning outcomes:

1. The Senate passes a resolution on the specification of rules for the recognition of learning outcomes. The resolution covers issues related to the mode of recognition, including rules for choosing the appropriate committees, their composition, the deadlines for submitting and processing of the applications for recognition of learning outcomes, the list of subjects included in the recognition process for each field of study carried out as part of the university, the rules of payment, application forms and a list of required documents, as well as the grading system (or credit rating scale).
2. Managers of basic organizational units can elect the recognition committees. The Rector can appoint an appeal committee.
3. An applicant shall submit a request for confirmation of the learning outcomes with the required documents and proof of payment of the fee, if any. The university can create a point of consultation, which would provide support in the preparation of documentation.
4. The Dean or the appointed recognition committee in the same composition that was selected according to the rules specified in the resolution of the Senate (recommended to appoint the commission consisting of the mentor / manager's direction, the representative of the dean, coordinator of the course / module) consider within a specified period the applications submitted for confirmation learning outcomes.
5. Dean or committee decides on the basis of the documents submitted compliance with the description of learning outcomes contained in the subject syllabus. Dean / Commission may decide to consider the subject, non-recognition of an object or refer the applicant to an additional exam.
6. In case of an application being deemed incomplete the Dean/Commission may deem and that the applicant should supplement their application.
7. An examination is administered in the absence of possibility of positive verification of all education effects specific for a particular module/course.
8. The Commission's positive decision or the satisfactory examination result mean course/ module completion.
9. Applicants are granted the right to appeal from the Dean's/Commission's decision by referring the matter to the Rector or Appeal Commission for Recognisability.

A schematic sequence of the recognisability procedure's stages together with activities comprising this procedure are presented in graph 1.

Before creating the procedures of recognition, the university should analyse the following questions:

1. What are the standards for the quality of education and what do we want to achieve?
2. How will we document the results of work of the Recognition Committee?
3. Who will be responsible for this process?
4. What mechanisms will be used for identifying and correcting errors in the recognition process?
5. How to develop and provide information on the process of recognition to the candidates?

The answers to the above questions will form the basis of the university system's further work by dividing it into four stages. Each of the above four stages has been explained one by one after figure 1 for more comprehend understanding. The details of these four stages can be observed in the following figure 1.

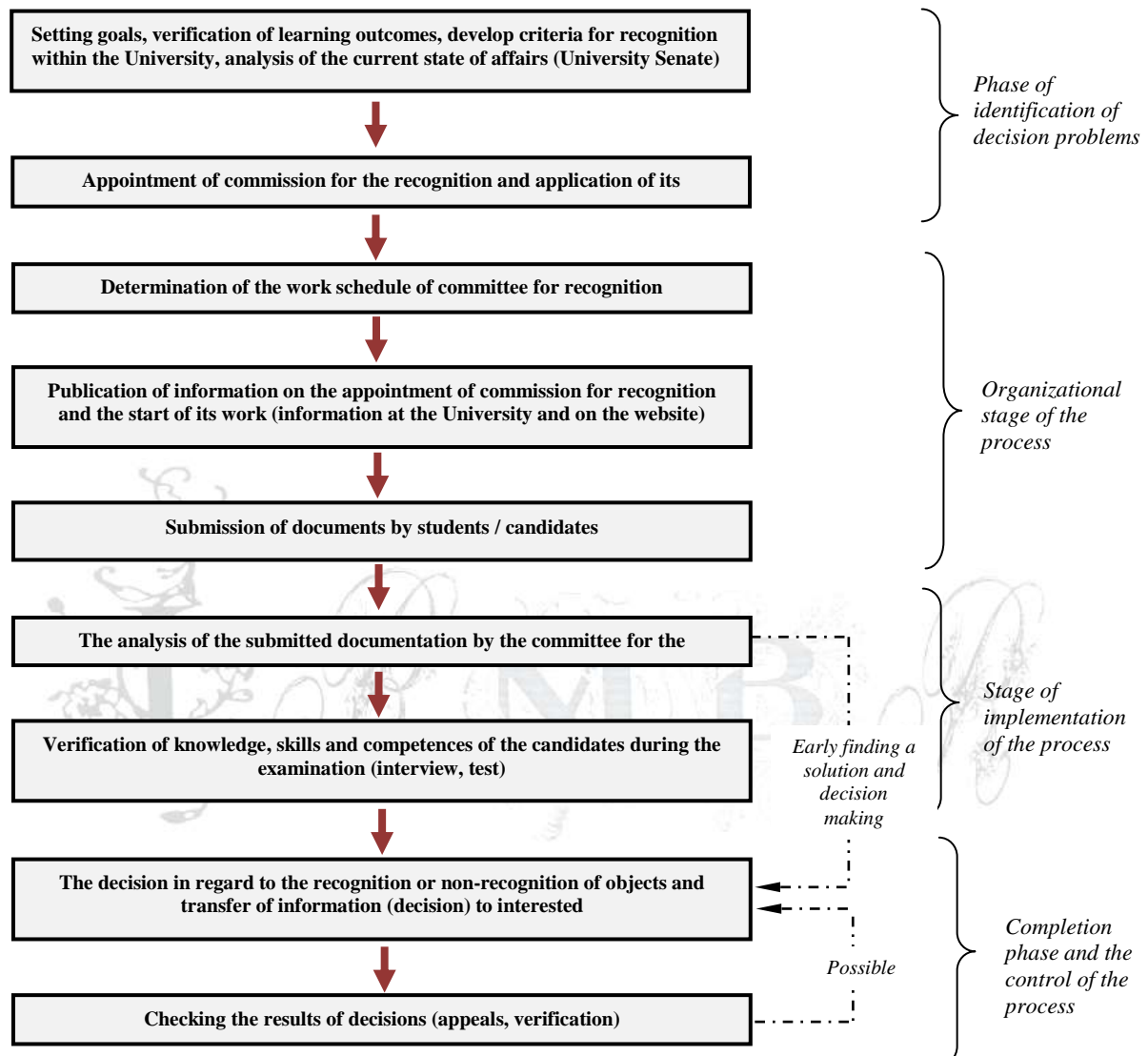


Figure 1. Organizational procedure of recognition process of learning outcomes
Source: own.

The First Stage is problem identification and establishing a mode of documenting the process. At this particular stage it is necessary to analyse the current situation, verify education effects and appoint Commission for Recognisability members:

1. The College's Senate passes a resolution on detailed specification of education effects' recognisability rules and procedures;
2. The resolution covers all issues connected with the recognisability mode including:
 - Rules of appointing the Commission for Recognisability,

- Commission members (it is recommended that the Commission should consist of a course supervisor/head tutor, course coordinator and the Dean's representative),
 - Application deadline for education effects recognition submission,
 - Lists of courses eligible for the recognition process separately for each Faculty of the College,
 - Charges levied,
 - Application forms,
 - Lists of required documents,
 - Grading system (a scale of grades or assignment completion);
3. The Commission for Recognisability may be appointed by heads of basic organisational units;
 4. The College Rector is in the position to appoint an Appeal Commission for Recognisability.

The first stage should be completed by the development and validation of specific documents. These are:

- Faculty Senate resolution on approval of the Rules of Procedure of the recognition process,
- Ordinance manager of an organization (eg. Dean) on the appointment of committee. Recognition,
- a list of items covered by the procedure of recognition (as an annex to the order),
- the composition of the committee appointed (as an annex to the order),
- a list of documents which form the basis for receiving credit under the recognition.

The Second Stage of work on the process is recognisability process organization whose main elements are preparing the Commission for Recognisability's work schedule and informing students about the availability of such a solution at their College. At this stage a candidate should individually specify and describe their skills as well as fill in relevant documents (course completion certificates, completed trainings and professional titles). It is important that certain opposition to recognising informal and extra-formal forms of education at the local level should be considered at this particular stage.

A person applying for recognising education effects within the time specified by the Senate resolution submits an application for confirming education effects along with all required documents and a proof of payment, should such a payment be required. The college may establish a consultation point which will assist students in preparing the required documentation. An important issue is also an indication of the candidate on a separate form of attachments, which would confirm their skills and knowledge. This document would also significantly improve the work of the Committee, as the student alone assigns the relevant annexes to the learning outcomes.

To this end, the University should develop instructions for the candidate, which should contain information on the nature of the process of recognition of learning outcomes, schedule (time in which the candidate should submit the documents and submission sites and information point for candidates) models for documents required for submission. Among the documents required from the candidate, the following are important (see examples below).

– **Student Application Form – Education Effects Recognition:**

.....
(Place and date)

.....
(Name and Surname)

.....
(Faculty/department/studies cycle/year of studies)

.....
(student ID No.)

.....
(head of basic organisation unit)

APPLICATION FOR EDUCATION EFFECTS RECOGNITION

I hereby apply for granting the following study courses run at first cycle studies at the Faculty of..... on the grounds of documents confirming acquisition of education effects through informal or non-formal systems.

| No. | Study course | Year of studies | Semester |
|-----|--------------|-----------------|----------|
| 1. | | | |
| 2. | | | |
| 3. | | | |
| 4. | | | |

Yours sincerely

.....
Signature

Attachments:

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

– **Compatibility Sheet** – the content of submitted documents and education effects (example):

.....*John Smith*.....
Name and surname

.....*Marketing*..... */I/*..
Study course year/semester

| No. | Education effects | Compatible | Attch. No. |
|-----|--|------------|------------|
| 1. | The Student is familiar with basic terminology from the field of marketing activity (marketing rules and problems) | X | 2, 3 |
| 2. | The student is familiar with the relevance of marketing activities undertaken in contemporary corporations | X | 2, 3 |
| 3. | The student is capable of applying key marketing aspects in a business enterprise | X | 2, 3 |
| 4. | The student is capable of analysing a target market and adjusting marketing strategies to meet its needs | X | 2, 3 |
| 5. | The student is creative in the field of searching for the right communication tools to communicate with the business environment | X | 2, 3 |

Source: own.

– **Accountant training certificate** - organized by the Association of Accountants in Poland in 2013:

The training included 80 hours in accordance with the training program

1. The records of business transactions
2. The records of costs and revenues for tax purposes and the balance

3. Settlement with employees
4. Public-Legal Settlements
5. Ethical standards in accounting
6. Preparation of financial statements

– **Certificate from the employer:**

ABC SA
NAME AND ADDRESS
(Stamp)

Gdańsk, 10.09.20xx
place and date

CERTIFICATE

regarding. achieved learning outcomes

John Smith

Name (employee / candidate to study)

Accounting Finance and Accounting Department

Position / Department

The scope of responsibilities:

1. The records of business transactions
2. Preparation of reports, statements and declarations in order to make the calculation of personnel costs, settlements with employees and social security
3. Developing a schedule of inventory and settlement of differences
4. Preparation of documents for archiving factory
5. Participation in the work of the team preparing financial statements (balance sheet and profit and loss account)

Participation in school's training schemes and other forms of improvement (name and scope of training / number of hours):

1. Closing 2013, 8 hours
2. Changes in the labor code and the system of remuneration, 8 hours
3. Inventory of 2012, 8 hours
4.

Participation in the work of project teams

1. Participation in the work of the team. Remuneration rules and regulations the Social Fund
2.
3.

Other skills and competences held by an employee

Very good knowledge of computer programs Finance and Accounting and Human Resources

.....

.....
Signature of the head of the unit / department

In case there are two or more subjects, for each of them a self-assessment sheet must be submitted that includes the learning outcomes described in the syllabus and the possibility of verification of the listed appendices must be indicated. A separate which should be prepared at this stage of the process of recognition is the schedule that takes into account the tasks of the Recognition Committee in the context of a procedure for recognition. The sequence of actions and their implementation over time may vary depending on the adopted timeframe and work at the University or Faculty.

The Third Stage of the process is concerned with the recognisability process implementation, which consists of verification of submitted documents from the point of view contents and completeness. This analysis is a starting point for further activities such as positive or negative verification of a candidate in view of the possibility of granting a study course concerned completion status. At this point it might be necessary to compare the self-assessment chart submitted by a candidate to a course programme concerned. At this stage it is important to enumerate the following key activities:

1. The dean or the appointed Commission for recognisability following the procedures stipulated by the resolution of the Senate considers applications for confirmation of education effects within a specified period of time; it is recommended that the among appointed Commission members there should be a head of department, a Dean's representative and a study course/module head tutor.
2. The dean or Commission ground their decision in the compatibility of submitted documents with the description of education effects specified in a study course syllabus.
3. The Dean/Commission have the right to accept or reject an application and consider a given study course completed or not as well as send an applicant for an additional verification examination.
4. In case the application is incomplete, the Dean / committee may request the applicant to complete the application.
5. The verification examination is administered in the absence of the possibility of positive verification assigned to a particular study course/module.
6. The Dean/Commission request a study course coordinator to prepare and administer a verification examination.

Presented below are some evaluation sheets for the commission to verify the learning outcomes acquired in informal and non-formal system. They provide examples of tools for assessment of documents submitted by the candidates.

Compatibility Sheet – The content of submitted documents and education effects specified by a study course syllabus (example 1):

.....**John Smith**.....
Name and surname

.....**Marketing**..... ..**I/I**...
Study course year/semester

| No. | Education effects | Compatible | Incompatible |
|-----|--|------------|--------------|
| 1. | The Student is familiar with basic terminology from the field of marketing activity (marketing rules and problems) | X | |
| 2. | The student is familiar with the relevance of marketing activities undertaken in contemporary corporations | X | |
| 3. | The student is capable of applying key marketing aspects in a business enterprise | | X |
| 4. | The student is capable of analysing a target market and adjusting marketing strategies to meet its needs | X | |
| 5. | The student is creative in the field of searching for the right communication tools to communicate with the business environment | | X |

Source: own.

.....
Place and date

.....
.....
Commission members' signatures

The first sheet can be used in a situation where the candidate is trying to get a recognition for a subject that does not end with getting a grade. In most cases, these can be e.g. lectures to choose from, which end with a credit or a non-credit (without a grade). In this case, the Recognition Committee assesses the compatibility of documents with the learning outcomes and decides on the inclusion or non-recognition of the subject. If the selected **class** ends with a signature then the grade given by the Recognition Committee should also be the final grade. In this case, the method of point should be used. An example of such an evaluation form is shown below.

Compatibility Sheet – the content of submitted documents and education effects specified by a study course syllabus (example 2) ³:

.....**John Smith**.....

Name and surname

.....**Marketing**..... **..I/I...**

Study course year/semester

| Assessment criteria | Weight | Grade scale | | | | | Partial grade |
|--|-------------|-------------|---|---|---|---|---------------|
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| The Student is familiar with basic terminology from the field of marketing activity (marketing rules and problems) | 0,25 | | X | | | | 0,50 |
| The student is familiar with the relevance of marketing activities undertaken in contemporary corporations | 0,25 | | X | | | | 0,50 |
| The student is capable of applying key marketing aspects in a business enterprise | 0,20 | | | X | | | 0,60 |
| The student is capable of analysing a target market and adjusting marketing strategies to meet its needs | 0,20 | | | | X | | 0,80 |
| The student is creative in the field of searching for the right communication tools to communicate with the business environment | 0,10 | | | X | | | 0,30 |
| Ogółem | 1,00 | | | | | | 2,70 |

Source: own.

Grade/points scale:

1.00 pt. – 1.99 pt. No recognition of education effects

2.00 pt. – 2.49 pt. examination verification necessary

(verification of skills/knowledge)

2.50 pkt. – 2.99 pt. satisfactory

3.00 pt. – 3.49 pt. Satisfactory plus

3.50 pt. – 3.99 pt. good

4.00 pt. – 4.99 pt. good plus

4.00 pt. – 5.00 pt. Very good

.....

Date and place

.....

.....

Commission members' signatures

³ The following grade/points assessment scale has been adopted for submitted documentation: 1 – Lack of compatibility of documents with education effects 2 – unsatisfactory/minima compatibility with education effects (examination and verification of knowledge/skills necessary); 3 – sufficient compatibility; 4 – good compatibility; 5 – very good compatibility.

The scoring method is used to define the learning outcomes in the subject, which will be summed up to give the final result. Then a certain weight is assigned to each individual effect, which reflects the proportion in which the effect will participate in the final evaluation, which is the sum of the individual ratings multiplied by the weight factors. This assessment indicates then the final result (evaluation) of the subject.

If the student receives a 1 in any of the tables, then - despite good ratings from other effects – it will not be accepted. Therefore, it is required to gain recognition of all learning outcomes by a grade from 2 to 5, a rating of 1 being caused by the lack of knowledge, skills and / or competences in terms of the effect of education.

The Fourth Stage is aimed at finalising the procedure and controlling its outcomes. At this point it is also necessary to specify the rules for making amendments in the grade and ECTS points supplement.

Positive verification by the Commission or a positive outcome of the verification examination amount to granting a course of study/module concerned completion status. Depending on the Senate's resolution, granting a course completion status amounts to acquiring a grade or course completion status along with a relevant number of ECTS points.

It is possible from the Dean's/Commission's decision to the Rector or Appeal Commission for Recognisability. On the one hand, the recognition process is supposed to encourage more candidates to study, and on the other it can and should contribute to a better integration of the academic community with the business sector. Another objective is to strengthen the bargaining power of graduates in the labour market and to enhance prospects of reducing the rate of unemployment by introducing recognition procedures of practical skills in the higher education. Youth unemployment is a path to social degradation, therefore actions taken by scientific and business institutions should lead to keeping young people either in education or enterprise sectors. In this policy, the role of non-formal education is crucial, though debatable. In vocational education, teaching and non-formal education programs are used in both formal institutions and beyond them, to allow improvement of qualifications, and in view of the possibility of finding employment. Informal education is now more precisely defined and funded as a means of levelling the shortcomings of professional qualifications of young people, and not as a job or action taken in their free time to achieve only their own interests. On the one hand, such a change is increasing the position of non-formal education, which has become essential in the fight against unemployment and possibly allows more flexible universities to appear, with more generous offers for new candidates through recognition of competences acquired in non-formal and informal education. A very important issue is therefore the effects of combining a formal and non-formal education, so that students that are already experienced and who have some certain knowledge of the informal system will be able to extend their knowledge and skills with the effects of formal education, and thus gain more skills and increase their bargaining power in the labour market in the future.

It is assumed that such programs will increase motivation of young people, but only when they are used in an individual manner for each student. This means that it should be possible to shape individual learning paths for each student who passes the validation procedure.

Conclusion

The presented organisational model is a part of the final product model recognition of educational outcomes of non-formal and informal learning which consists of:

- Legal model,
- Organizational model,
- Utility model.

The legal model presents examples of internal regulations that must be developed by universities, including the resolution of the Senate concerning the implementation of the recognition process and the procedures for the appointment of regulations of studies and Recognition Committees at different faculties of the university. The documents developed within the framework of the model are consistent with Polish legal requirements and guidelines of the European Union.

The utility model presents the examination rules for selected subjects implemented under study. The candidates whose part of the educational outcome was not accepted can be directed to the exam (test, oral exam, preparation of specific tasks in a workshop) For this purpose, the model contains some sample tests to make it possible to verify the skills possessed by the candidate, which could not have been judged positively on the basis of submitted documents.

While analysing the solutions adopted in the model, it should be noted that the implementation of the organizational model will result in changes in the functioning of the university, as well as the verification rules held by the student learning outcomes. The model also responds to the expectations of potential candidates who are keeping pace with the changes in the working market to take the new challenge of lifelong learning and retain professional activity. The benefits of implementation of the model affect all stakeholders, while preserving the autonomy of universities and allowing to keep the quality of education at a high level.

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