



Guide to Good Practice

recruitment and overseas promotion for higher education institutions



UNIVERSITY
OF LODZ



UNIC

NAWA

Prepared by:

University of Lodz

International Relations Office

Authors:

Justyna Izydorczyk - has been part of the International Relations Office since 2010. She is responsible for recruiting international candidates—those without Polish citizenship—to study in English. She also served as the project manager for *Linked to UL*, which was implemented under the International Alumni NAWA programme.

Mieczysław Pakosz - joined the International Relations Office in 2014. His role focuses on recruiting candidates without Polish citizenship to study in Polish. He was the project manager of *UActive*, under the Foreign Promotion NAWA programme.

Anna Stolarek - has been working at the International Relations Office since 2023. She manages social media, translations, and coordinates a *UL Mentor* initiative designed to support international students.



Łódź, May 2025

Implemented under the project entitled “Strengthening of admission potential of the University of Lodz and enhancing UL’s brand at chosen educational markets” which is funded by the Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange under the Welcome to Poland Programme 2022, based on the agreement number PPI/WTP/2022/1/00025/U/00001.

Table of contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Introduction | 4 |
| Social media | 7 |
| Webinars | 9 |
| Educational fairs | 11 |
| Cooperation with recruitment agencies | 13 |
| Open days | 15 |
| Content marketing activities | 17 |
| Variable external conditions | 20 |
| Mentor projects | 22 |
| Welcome Point | 25 |
| Onboarding | 27 |
| Recruitment systems | 31 |
| Internationalization at home | 33 |
| University Without Borders: marketing, tools and tips for international recruitment | 34 |
| International Admission Staff Training Week 12-16 May 2025 | 36 |

Introduction

In presenting this handbook, it is important to emphasize from the outset that all the information provided has been prepared with international candidates and students at higher education institutions in mind. While the handbook offers useful insights, it does not aim to cover the entire subject. International recruitment and promotion are broad and multifaceted areas, requiring university staff to consider a wide range of factors in order to operate effectively in foreign markets.

The preparation of this handbook would not have been possible without external support. At the University of Lodz, a project titled "*Strengthening the recruitment potential of the University of Lodz and developing the UL brand in selected educational markets*" was implemented, funded by the Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange under the *Welcome to Poland* Programme (2022), based on agreement PPI/WTP/2022/1/00025/U/00001. It is important to note that this was one of several projects under the aforementioned programme through which the University of Lodz secured funding to support its internationalization efforts. This initiative was part of a broader, long-term strategy carried out over the past decade to make the University of Lodz an appealing destination for students from around the world—without geographical limitations.

The content of this handbook is derived from several sources. The authors primarily relied on their own extensive experience in promotion and recruitment. Additionally, as part of the project, four study visits were carried out to leading European universities that are also strategic partners within the framework of the European University Alliance UNIC. These visits aimed to enhance the competencies of UL staff through the exchange of experiences and best practices. The selected institutions are leaders in the field of international recruitment and marketing, with a focus on presenting themselves as welcoming places to study, offering well-being-oriented programmes. The selection of universities was based on their compatibility with UL's strategy, similarity in recruitment and marketing activities, and high rankings. The following institutions were chosen:

- **Koç University in Istanbul (Türkiye)** – a leading Turkish university according to the Times Higher Education ranking. It is a private institution with an advanced onboarding and cultural programme for international students, including a mentoring programme, information packages for parents, and strong engagement with international alumni.
- **University of Zagreb (Croatia)** – one of the largest public universities in the Balkans, which emphasizes international education programmes, 'internationalization at home,' and preparing students for a global work environment.
- **Erasmus University Rotterdam (Netherlands)** – a public university with a high proportion of international students (over 20%). Students come from various countries, creating a multicultural academic environment. The university is also highly engaged in supporting refugees from Ukraine, offering dedicated study and support programmes.
- **University of Oulu (Finland)** – known for its ambassador programme that promotes studies among international candidates (75% of international students come from outside the EU). Like its partner in Rotterdam, it offers a wide range of support for Ukrainian refugees.

Such visits to other European universities remained innovative on a national scale. Until now, similar initiatives had only been implemented in projects by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education (University Management Leaders), Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń (NCU4U), and the Warsaw School of Economics (Invisible, Non-Essential – domestic visits).

In many staff exchange projects, the thematic focus is usually on student and staff mobility. However, there has been a lack of opportunities to exchange experiences in the field of international recruitment or marketing of study programmes in foreign educational markets, particularly the sharing of best practices with European universities.

Therefore, another initiative undertaken by the University of Lodz was the short-term mobilities of selected administrative staff to counterpart departments responsible for promotion and recruitment.

The highlight of these efforts was a training event organized from May 12–16 in the form of a 'staff week' for employees of both international and domestic universities. The format of sharing best practices was complemented by workshops and lectures on topics such as the

recognition of foreign educational documents, the use of social media, presentations of selected higher education systems, content marketing, onboarding activities, mentoring programmes, the organization of welcome points, and double degree programmes, recruitment systems and the use of artificial intelligence in education were also among the topics covered. The event was attended by 32 participants from Albania, Estonia, Greece, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Germany, Poland, South Africa, Romania, Türkiye, Italy, and Hungary.

In summary, this handbook is the result of the passion that the staff of the International Relations Office have for recruitment and promotion. Over the years, they have acquired extensive knowledge in these areas. The IRO team has taken a step further—not only by sharing their best practices, but also by carefully listening to the solutions implemented by other European universities. We warmly invite you to explore this handbook!



Social media

The University of Lodz has for many years actively used social media to maintain effective communication with prospective and current students, including those from abroad. To ensure consistency in communication and provide support and a sense of security to all members of the community, a set of social media guidelines for UniLodz profiles has been introduced.



International Students Office - University of Lodz

12 tys. polubienia • 13 tys. obserwujący











Social media are dynamic platforms that attract a wide audience and are increasingly replacing traditional recruitment tools, especially

for candidates located hundreds or thousands of kilometers away from our institution. We care about the well-being of our community by ensuring that every member has access to information while respecting their sense of safety.

The International Relations Office (IRO UL) administers the Facebook page *International Students Office #polishuniversity*. This profile promotes international student mobility and integration events for international students, such as 'Christmas Guest,' and holiday dinners organized for Christmas and Easter.

The Facebook page *International Students Office – University of Lodz* plays a key role in informing and supporting international candidates interested in studying at the University of Lodz. It is a place where people from around the world can find up-to-date information about recruitment, academic life, and university events – all in English, which is not always available on the university's official websites. Facebook has been replaced by other platforms in Europe, but it remains very popular in many countries around the world, as discussed below.

For prospective students, the page is a valuable source of knowledge about available programmes, admission requirements, and the academic and social opportunities offered by the university. They can find information about the application process, deadlines, and tips on living in Łódź.

| | |
|--|---|
|  <p>Pon, 9 gru 2024 ERASMUS+ Days! 2024 Uniwersytet Łódzki · Łódź Wydarzenie Wyjazdy zagraniczne studentów UŁ</p> |  <p>Wt, 11 lut 2020 Nie daj się wkręcić! #ruszajnaerasmusa Wydział Ekonomiczno-Socjologiczny Uniwersytet Łódzki · Łódź...</p> |
|  <p>Wt, 3 gru 2019 UL Diversity Days by EkSoc 2019 Wydział Ekonomiczno-Socjologiczny Uniwersytet Łódzki · Łódź...</p> |  <p>Czw, 28 lis 2019 Podziel się dobrocią i zaproś studenta na Święta! Uniwersytet Łódzki · Łódź Wydarzenie Uniwersytet Łódzki</p> |
|  <p>Pon, 27 maj 2019 Be a Mentor with ESN UŁ Wydarzenie Erasmus Student Network UŁ Łódź</p> |  <p>Śr, 5 gru 2018 II Uniwersytecki Dzień Różnorodności / Diversity Day vol. 2 Wydział Zarządzania Uniwersytet Łódzki · Łódź Wydarzenie Uniwersytet Łódzki</p> |
|  <p>Wt, 5 gru 2017 Uniwersytecki Dzień Różnorodności Uniwersytet Łódzki · Wydział Filologiczny · Łódź Wydarzenie Uniwersytet Łódzki</p> |  <p>Czw, 11 paź 2012 The 10th Rectorial Lecture: „The Protection of Our Rights as Taxpayers” Wydział Prawa i Administracji Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego · Łódź...</p> |

For students currently studying at the University of Lodz, the page serves as a helpful tool for accessing the latest announcements and university events. It enables our international student community to stay informed about cultural activities, university initiatives, and opportunities for personal development.

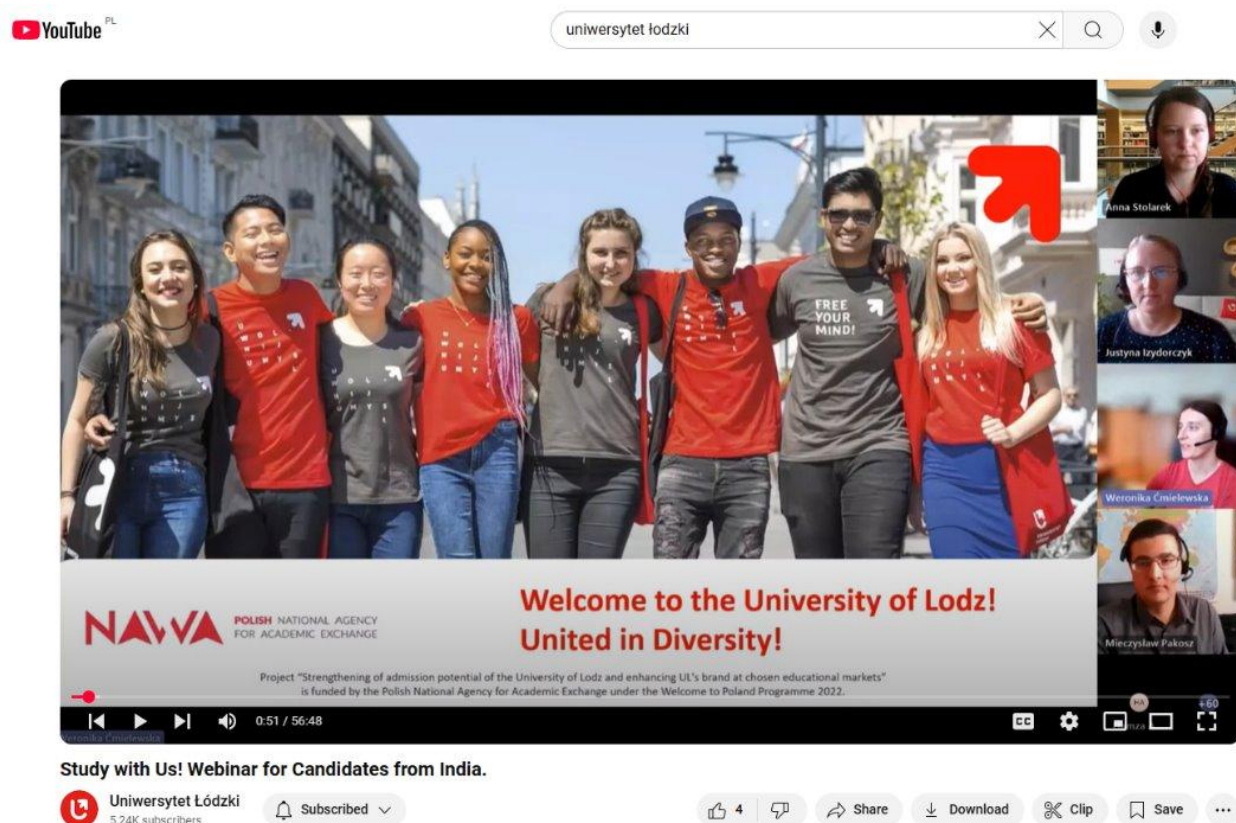
When deciding to promote a higher education institution or study offer abroad through social media, it is essential to first answer several key questions. Most importantly, one should consider whether the goal is to promote globally or regionally—this is crucial because in some countries, certain social media platforms are used more frequently than others. In this regard, the tool *Overview of social media use* (datareportal.com) can be helpful, as it allows users to determine which platform reaches the desired level of popularity depending on the country. At the same time, it should be emphasized that international promotion complements other communication methods and channels, even if a different language is used.

It is also important to regularly review the social media channels used so far and assess the effectiveness of each platform and communication format. Just as crucial is clearly defining the purpose of these activities and aligning them with the profile of potential international candidates—while also considering the resources available for managing each communication channel.

Webinars

In cases where physical presence in the target country is not possible—whether for recruiting prospective students or, crucially, engaging with current students and alumni—and when social media proves ineffective, it is worth considering the organization of webinars for candidate groups from selected countries.

As part of the project, the International Relations Office at the University of Lodz organized webinars specifically for prospective students from India, Bangladesh, and Zimbabwe. To effectively reach these target groups, event registration was actively promoted—not only through word-of-mouth, but also via targeted advertising. Facebook ads were launched a few days before each session to inform and encourage additional participants from the respective regions to join.

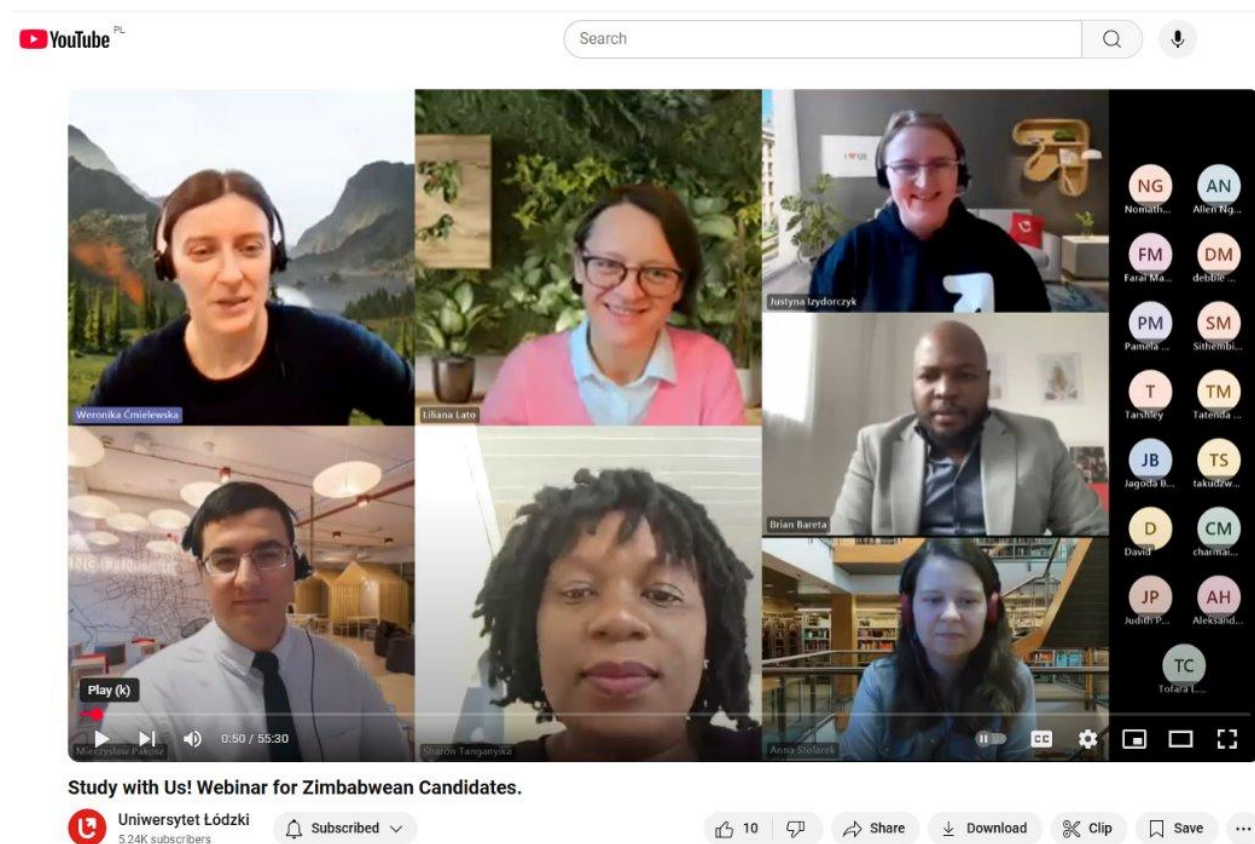


Graduates of the University of Lodz from these countries were invited to participate in meetings with prospective students. During short presentations, they shared why they chose to study in Poland and at UL, what challenges they faced at the beginning of their stay, and why they

believe it is worth living in Poland. Hearing from alumni from the same country makes the presented content more credible to prospective students.

The International Relations Office (IRO) is fully aware of how important it is to take care of every international student at the beginning of their stay in a new country. Therefore, during the webinars, it was emphasized that students arriving at UL are well supported and can count on assistance from university staff with any issue.

In total, over 400 people participated in the events, and the recordings were later distributed online, reaching even more interested individuals. The webinars were published on YouTube — for example, the webinar for candidates from India has received over 5,000 views.



Educational fairs

The experience of the University of Lodz demonstrates that direct contact between prospective students and university staff, current students, and alumni yields the most effective recruitment results. Education fairs provide opportunities for one-on-one conversations with university



representatives and access to reliable information about academic offerings directly from recruitment experts.

For students and their parents—who are often key decision-makers in the university selection process—these fairs are an invaluable chance to compare different institutions and plan future educational paths.

The most frequently asked questions concerned scholarship opportunities, programmes offered in English, stages of the recruitment process, as well as housing conditions and the cost of living in Łódź and Poland. UL staff also provided information about available scholarship

programmes, such as the Banach Scholarship (NAWA) and Visegrad Scholarships.

An alumnus of UL—a citizen of Azerbaijan who completed a master's degree in 2019 and now works for an international company in Baku—was also present at the booth.

Beyond the obvious benefit of attracting candidates, education fairs also serve as a valuable source of insight into the educational market. They help universities better understand the expectations of potential students and adjust their promotional strategies to local conditions.

It is also important to maximize the effectiveness of trips related to education fairs. If the university has bilateral relations with a local institution in the host country, it is advisable to arrange a visit and present not only the study offer but also opportunities for academic mobility.

In many cases, fair organizers also facilitate visits to secondary schools, which—as the University of Lodz’s experience shows—can be even more effective than the fairs themselves.



In 2023 and 2025, the University of Lodz participated in the following education fairs: IFET (Istanbul, Türkiye), A2 (Baku, Azerbaijan), and Myfair (Tashkent and Samarkand, Uzbekistan). During the fairs, materials showcasing UL’s study offer were distributed, and specially prepared, engaging short promotional videos—created as part of the project—were presented.

The selection of fairs was preceded by a detailed analysis of the attractiveness of studying in Poland among potential candidates from each country. According to the Study in Poland reports *Foreign Students in Poland*, the number of students from Azerbaijan nearly quadrupled (from 479 in 2017 to 1,814 in 2021); from Uzbekistan, it increased sixfold (from 340 in 2017 to 2,141 in 2021); and students from Türkiye have long ranked among the top five largest groups of international students in Poland.

Cooperation with recruitment agencies

Educational agencies, also known as recruitment agencies, are one of the channels through which prospective students are attracted to universities. Often, candidates represented by such intermediaries appear in the recruitment systems of higher education institutions—even without the institution’s prior knowledge or in the absence of formal cooperation.

In addition to preparing the required documents for university and visa applications, agencies often provide guidance on choosing a programme aligned with the candidate’s interests and help prepare them for the realities they will face in a foreign country. This is especially important for individuals who come from different cultural backgrounds.



From the university’s perspective, recruitment agencies can serve as one of the channels for communicating educational offerings to international candidates. As part of the project, the University of Lodz organized an event called *Virtual Agent Camp* twice—a training session during which recruitment agency staff were thoroughly introduced to UL’s procedures, academic offer, the city of Łódź as a study destination, and the principles of cooperation. One simple tool for building a database of agencies is to prepare questionnaires about their services, communication methods with clients (candidates and their parents), promotional strategies, and references, in order to select the most suitable ones. These questionnaires can include a wide range of questions, which can be tailored to the university’s needs—covering experience, work organization, promotional methods, target countries, or challenges they face.

The online training for international recruitment agents, conducted by UL staff, allowed the university to refresh relationships with existing partner agencies and expand its network with new ones before the recruitment process began. This type of online training brings mutual value: UL can expect greater reliability from agencies in the recruitment process thanks to their deeper understanding of the university, while agents are better prepared to carry out recruitment procedures.



University of Lodz / Poland / European Union

RULES OF COOPERATION WITH EDUCATIONAL AGENCIES

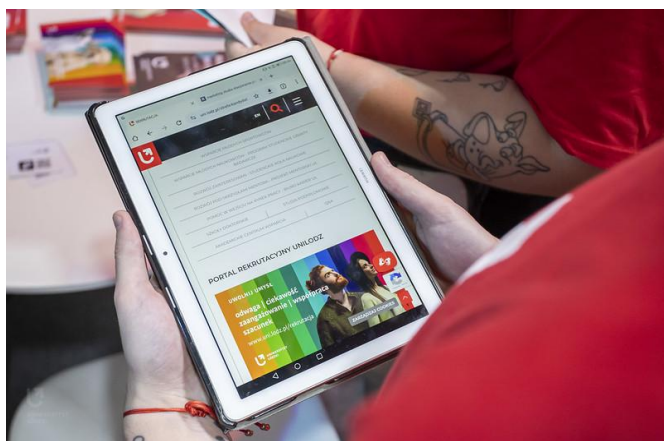
thank you very much for being interested in the educational offer of the University of Lodz, located in Poland (European Union). Below please find crucial information about the rules of cooperation with educational agencies, as well as specific information about the University of Lodz which will answer most of questions to help candidates make a decision about their study destination.

Each agency offer submitted to the University of Lodz is analyzed in terms of its usefulness in achieving recruitment goals. Agencies are provided with a comprehensive set of detailed information regarding the terms of cooperation and the offer for international candidates. They receive a full description of the recruitment procedure, candidate requirements, available study programmes, data on the cost of living and studying, and support services for international students. Moreover, agencies are required to complete a questionnaire, with the section on references from other universities proving especially valuable in promoting future collaboration.

Additionally, information about the city of Łódź, its attractiveness, and employment opportunities for students is presented. The document is intended to help agencies decide whether to cooperate and to assist their clients in choosing a university and field of study.

Open days

The period between the closing of one recruitment cycle and the opening of the next is a crucial time for administrative staff responsible for recruiting international candidates. It is during this



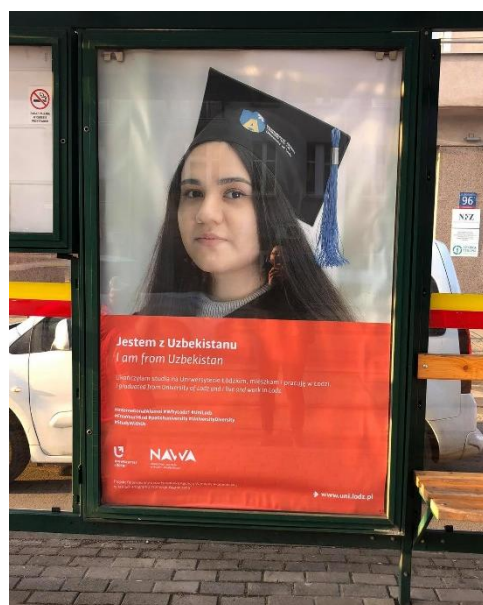
time that they meet with prospective students who are preparing to choose the university and field of study that will shape their near future. This is an important decision, and it is worth being well-prepared for it.

The University of Lodz invites candidates to open meetings, where students can learn more about specific faculties and

their study programmes, as well as the opportunities offered by studying at UL, particularly in the full-time format.

An example of such initiatives includes the *Ukrainian Days at UL*—events organized in two consecutive academic years. These were aimed at potential candidates from Ukraine and were conducted both online and on-site at the University of Lodz. The on-site format targeted students attending secondary schools in the Łódź metropolitan area, while the online format was designed for all other candidates for whom direct travel was difficult.

To promote the event, targeted online ads were used, along with posters placed in areas where Ukrainian students live, and through schools that collaborate with UL. During the on-site day, an information point was open all day, and after the programme ended, students were divided into groups and given a campus tour. In total, 400 students participated in both the on-site and online formats.



This initiative continued efforts launched years earlier as part of a promotional campaign targeting Łódź residents with Ukrainian backgrounds. The campaign featured advertisements in both Ukrainian and Polish, displayed on bus stop shelters operated by the Municipal Transport Company in Łódź. These ads encouraged people to consider studying at the University of Lodz, highlighting the benefit of children staying close to their parents who were already working locally.

The campaign was later reinforced by a second wave of advertisements in English and Polish, aimed at other international residents of Łódź. This phase featured international alumni of the University and targeted both the broader city population and individuals from countries other than Ukraine.



International candidates already living in the university's city are often an underutilized recruitment resource. In many cases, parents working in Poland bring their children from abroad. Through targeted campaigns and open days, universities can encourage these students to consider pursuing higher education close to home.

Content marketing activities



Content marketing can be understood as a strategic approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly defined audience. Ultimately, the goal is to drive desired behaviors from the recipients of such content. In the context of higher education institutions, the aim of content marketing is to support prospective students at various stages of their decision-making process by providing materials tailored to their needs. The educational offer should be presented in a benefit-oriented language, highlighting student experiences and integrating their stories alongside descriptions of study programmes

Content marketing becomes particularly complex when targeting international candidates, as it requires the development of a target persona before content creation begins. While we do not aim to explain how to create personas—this is well covered in marketing literature—understanding the audience’s needs, challenges, and emotions is essential for producing content that resonates and builds trust. At the same time, it enables universities to effectively reach the right audience segments and identify their specific problems and expectations.



In traditional content marketing, defining just a few personas is often enough to clearly outline the characteristics of different audience segments. However, in global recruitment, the diversity of candidates’ countries of origin, languages, interests, educational backgrounds, social statuses, preferred social media platforms, pre-migration concerns, and motivations for choosing a particular university means that a much broader range of personas is required. These personas should be tailored to the specific study programme or offer being promoted, as well as to the target country of the campaign.

An important element of these activities is user-generated content—content created by users of our social media platforms (followers and others). It is a fact that audiences tend to trust real users of a service more than promotional content generated directly by the brand. The most valuable content includes comments and photos featuring elements related to the university. Given that authenticity is one of the most valued qualities among prospective students, it is essential to focus on portraying real experiences and conveying that reality to the audience. Showing everyday university life and genuine student experiences helps prospective students imagine themselves in that environment and better understand the challenges they may face. Due to the nature of the target groups, values such as inclusivity and diversity are equally important. When planning a content marketing strategy, it is crucial to understand how a candidate chooses their destination country and university, and how many potential institutions might be on their 'most wanted' list.

The moment of reaching the candidate is key, as the goal is to ensure that our university is added to their list. This creates an opportunity to build a long-term relationship and mutual loyalty with future students.

Variable external conditions

The recruitment of international candidates is often influenced by political or legal developments in specific educational markets, as well as by the immigration policies of host countries. One such change occurred in Poland in 2024. On July 31, 2024, the Minister of Foreign Affairs issued new guidelines for consuls in countries outside the EU, OECD, and those without bilateral agreements on mutual recognition of education. These guidelines updated the list of visa requirements for student visa applicants.

Under the new regulations, all candidates applying for a first-cycle or long-cycle master's degree programme were required to present a decision from the relevant education superintendent recognizing their foreign secondary school certificate as equivalent to a Polish one.

Another significant change came with the Act of April 4, 2025, amending certain laws to eliminate irregularities in the visa system of the Republic of Poland. This act introduced revolutionary changes in the system for confirming eligibility to continue education at the next level of study. It also introduced requirements for preliminary exams for selected groups of candidates and narrowed the list of documents accepted as proof of language proficiency in the language of instruction for international applicants.

Previously, based on university autonomy, international students affected by this process were required to obtain the recognition decision after arriving in Poland—either before the start of the academic year or during the first semester. Universities, exercising their autonomy, would set deadlines for submitting the superintendent's decision, under penalty of revoking the admission decision or enrollment, in accordance with Article 162, paragraphs 2 and 3 of the Code of Administrative Procedure.

The unexpected move by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was implemented after the recruitment process had already concluded, at a time when most candidates were trying to secure appointments to submit their visa applications. In some consular offices, applications without the superintendent's decision were not accepted; in others, they were accepted under the condition that the decision would be submitted promptly. In yet other cases, candidates were simply issued visa refusals.

This caused significant damage to the image of Poland as a desirable destination for higher

education—a reputation that had been built over the past decade. It also poses a risk of losing Poland’s competitive advantage in the international education market, particularly in comparison to regional peers such as the Visegrad Group and the Baltic states.

The MFA’s requirement for student visa applicants to submit an administrative decision from the education superintendent is, in most cases, extremely difficult to fulfill. The process, even for those already in Poland, takes one to two months. Superintendents do not process applications online and face staffing limitations. Additionally, many candidates were unable to obtain certified translations, as sworn translators are not available in their home countries. On September 26, 2024, the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs submitted a legislative proposal aimed at addressing irregularities in the visa system. This move followed growing concerns about uncontrolled migration and the misuse of student visas.

Key Changes Introduced

Centralization of Recognition Procedures

- The **Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange (NAWA)** now oversees the recognition of foreign educational documents, including diplomas for second-cycle (master’s) studies.
- Candidates must present **NAWA-issued confirmation** that their foreign certificate or diploma qualifies them for higher education in Poland.

Mandatory Entrance Exams

- For candidates whose documents are not automatically recognized (e.g., from non-EU/OECD countries), universities must conduct **entrance exams or interviews** to assess academic readiness or specific aptitudes.

Language Proficiency Requirements

- Candidates must demonstrate **language proficiency at a minimum B2 level** in the language of instruction.
- The Ministry of Science and Higher Education will define acceptable proof of language skills via regulation.

Visa Application Restrictions

- Student visas will only be issued if the candidate presents:
- A recognized educational document.

- Proof of language proficiency.
- A positive result from an entrance exam or interview.
- Universities must notify consulates if a student fails to begin studies after receiving a visa.

Institutional Oversight

- The Ministry of Internal Affairs gains authority to **approve or revoke university permissions** to admit international students.
- Institutions primarily serving international students may face scrutiny or restrictions.

POL-on System Integration

- The **POL-on database** will include detailed records of international students accessible to consulates and ministries.
- Failure to update POL-on may result in denial of permission to offer study programmes.

Impact on Recruitment

- These changes significantly affect recruitment strategies, especially in countries without bilateral recognition agreements.
- The unpredictability and administrative burden may deter candidates and damage Poland's reputation as a study destination.



Mentor projects

Virtual support, assistance at the Welcome Point, faculty tours, and integration activities—these are just some of the forms of support that student mentors at the University of Lodz provide to newly arrived international students during their first weeks in Poland. In today's global world, where academic mobility has become widespread, the role of volunteering takes on special significance.

Students who choose to become mentors for newly arrived international students not only help them adapt to a new environment but also build intercultural bridges that strengthen the academic community.



Volunteering in this form is not only an act of support but also an expression of solidarity and openness to diversity, enriching both the mentors and their mentees. Thanks to their engagement and empathy, mentors become guides and friends, helping new students feel at home.

Mentors are senior students at UL, both Polish and international, who wholeheartedly and devotedly help international students navigate their new reality after beginning studies in a foreign country. They provide information in online groups, answer numerous questions about academic organization, and explain the Onboarding course and the Virtual Welcome Centre.

They also assist in organizing welcome activities for new international students—such as a barbecue, city games, and sports competitions—held during the intense first month of the academic year.

Thanks to their participation, engagement, and open attitude, mentors naturally serve as a bridge between the university and the student community. Their involvement ensures that the support offered is not only institutional but also personal and human, embodied by specific, dedicated individuals.



It is worth noting that UL mentors work on a voluntary basis, and their preparation for joining the 'special task force' began as early as May, with training sessions organized by the International Relations Office of the University of Lodz.

'I love being a mentor and helping exchange students prepare for life in Łódź. This experience makes me feel more confident and improves my language skills. Being a mentor allows me to broaden my horizons, learn more about the world, people, and their cultures, and build amazing friendships.' says Agnieszka, one of the mentors.

Welcome Point

The Welcome Point space, funded by NAWA, located in the University of Lodz Library building, has been created especially for our newly arrived students. It serves as a place where students can seek support from mentors. Every international student beginning their studies at the university faces new challenges—such as organizing their class schedule, adapting to unfamiliar subjects, or understanding how the exam session works.



For students from other countries, there are additional challenges that many of us may not even be aware of—such as not knowing the Polish language or the realities of life in Łódź and Poland, cultural differences, and unfamiliar educational systems.

For many of them, this is their first time abroad or even their first extended stay away from home (as studies can last from one semester to several years), making the separation from family particularly difficult.

To help international students adjust to their new environment, UL staff organize welcome meetings every year for new students, as well as other integration activities such as picnics, trips, Easter dinners, Christmas dinners, and a beautiful, one-of-a-kind initiative called *Christmas Guest*, in which UL staff invite international students to their family Christmas Eve celebrations.

Many of the challenges faced by newly arrived students have been identified by the International Relations Office (IRO) through surveys and focus group studies. These studies show that while students are satisfied with the broad institutional support, they also wish for more frequent peer interactions and opportunities to share experiences. This was one of the inspirations behind the creation of the Welcome Point and the involvement of student mentors.



In addition to mentor support, Welcome Point offers a space for networking, a variety of board games, and free Wi-Fi access. Among the many questions raised at Welcome Point, some of the most common are

surprisingly simple—such as where to shop affordably or how to use public transportation.

'Welcome Point is a wonderful place where I was finally able to get answers to my questions and lots of useful information about how to make the most of my time at UL. And I got to play my favorite game—Scrabble!' said Blessing Agatha, a full-degree student from Nigeria. 'Welcome Point is truly a great initiative.'

'I like Welcome Point because it helps exchange students solve many problems. Everyone here is cool,' said Jodie, an exchange student from Taiwan.

New students can also benefit from the Virtual Welcome Centre, where they can find key information about living and studying in Łódź. It is a virtual, publicly accessible knowledge base about the study process at the University of Lodz.

Onboarding



The Onboarding Course for international students was created as part of the *Welcome Onboard* project, funded by NAWA under the *Welcome to Poland (WtP)* programme. Its goal is to help newly arrived students navigate both the University of Lodz and the city itself.

Upon logging into the Moodle platform, students gain access to four modules and a final test, all available in both Polish and English language.



At the heart of the course is the story of Alex, the main character, who takes students on a journey through Łódź and the University of Lodz. Along the way, Alex shares stories from student life, practical tips, and interesting facts about the university and the city. This narrative approach helps participants feel more confident and better prepared to adapt to life at UL.



Alex explains complex topics—such as residence legalization, health insurance, and academic etiquette—in a clear and accessible way. He also encourages international exchange and guides students to the appropriate university offices for help with specific issues.

The course stands out thanks to its engaging 2D animation style and interactive elements. Students complete tasks, take quizzes, and access downloadable materials, all of which support effective learning and faster integration into the academic community.

Additionally, the course features an AI-generated voice for Alex and includes audio descriptions, ensuring it meets accessibility standards.

The project posed a significant challenge for the IRO Team, as it required analyzing the needs of new students and consulting with them throughout the development process. It also involved working with a contractor in a field that was entirely new to the university staff. Through collaborative efforts on the script, graphics, and animation, an innovative support tool was created for students beginning their studies at the University of Lodz.

One limitation encountered was the Moodle platform itself, which did not support all the planned functionalities.

What makes the course innovative is its interactivity, gamification elements, and advanced graphics. The content has been tailored to a youth-friendly tone and adapted to meet diverse

cultural expectations. Coordinating all these elements demanded close collaboration and flexibility from the dedicated team.

Thanks to this course, students can begin their journey at the University of Lodz in a stress-free way. They gain valuable knowledge about the university, its core values, and student life in Łódź.

The course not only educates but also encourages active participation in academic life, contributing to students' overall well-being and satisfaction during their time at the university.



One of the most significant outcomes of implementing the course is the strengthened image of the University of Łódź as an institution that listens to and addresses the needs of its students—particularly international ones. Since 2019, the University of Łódź has ranked among the top Polish public universities in terms of the number of international students. The onboarding course complements other initiatives such as the Welcome Point and UŁ Mentors, further enhancing the university's professional student support system.

A student who feels oriented in their new environment feels safe—and that sense of security allows them to begin their studies with peace of mind. One element that students especially appreciated was the reward system for completing the course. Every participant who finished the onboarding course received a package of University of Łódź-branded gadgets. The set included reusable water bottles, UŁ caps, door hangers, and other practical and visually appealing items. These small but thoughtful gifts were very popular and widely used by students in their daily lives, helping to foster a sense of belonging to the academic community.

Additionally, five students who achieved the highest scores on the final test were awarded special prizes. This initiative not only motivated students to actively engage with the course but also enhanced their positive experience of starting their studies at the University of Łódź.

To further support students, short instructional videos were created, covering key aspects of their first days in Poland. Three new promotional spots were also produced, aligned with the project's and university's slogans: *From applicant to graduate* (**Get on board**), *UL's offer* (**Join us**), *UL's diversity* (**Free your mind**). Below, we present examples of these videos.

How to get to Łódź? | UL Student Guide

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xjlwxkGLP1I>

Welcome Point | UL Student Guide

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UYJLyJGX8VA>

Things to keep in mind | UL Student Guide

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Jv1L6jUw9o>



Recruitment systems

One of the key factors in successfully attracting a large number of applicants is having an innovative admissions system tailored to the administrative demands of processing international student applications. Managing these candidates involves considerable additional work, including remote document verification and continuous communication to guide them effectively through the admissions process.

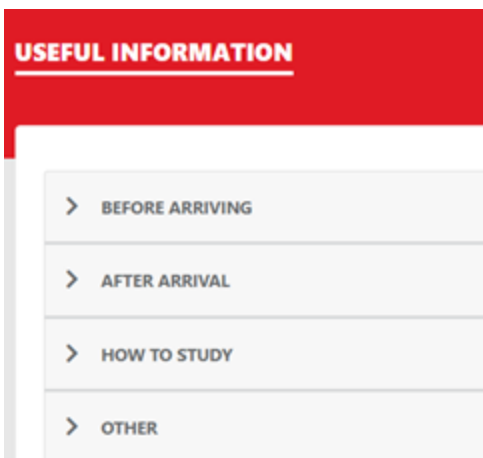
It is essential that the system goes beyond simple registration—such as entering data and uploading documents—and instead intuitively leads applicants through each stage of the recruitment journey. To meet this need, the International Relations Office at the University of Łódź has developed a proprietary IT tool featuring four core functionalities.



The timing of candidate registration is one of the most critical factors in the recruitment process. Applicants often apply to several universities and ultimately choose the one that processes their application the fastest. Therefore, the speed of the admissions process directly impacts the number of strong candidates secured in the early stages.

Equally important is the applicant's overall experience. A smooth and positive admissions process significantly enhances the university's image. Features such as message templates and the ability to send personalized bulk messages contribute to this. A clear, user-friendly system—supported by well-designed graphics—plays a key role in shaping that experience.

Another major advantage of the system is its internal communication capabilities. A well-structured bilingual platform allows administrative staff to quickly access candidate information, streamlining workflows and significantly reducing service time. Staff can easily view a candidate's status and documents, ensuring a fast, continuous flow of information and timely feedback.

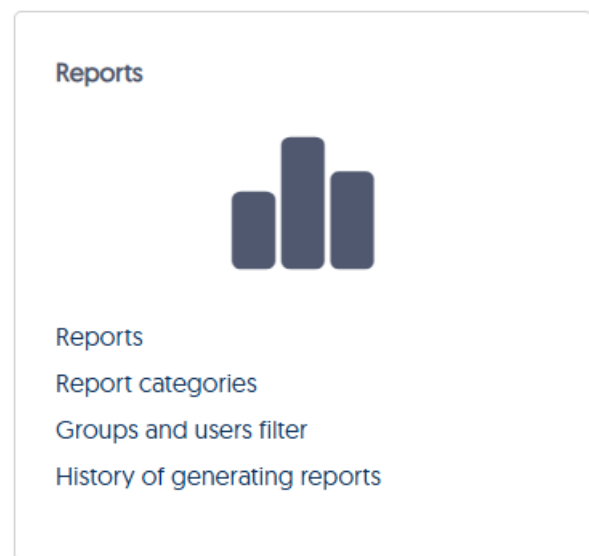


The final essential feature is on-demand reporting. A robust system enables the generation of real-time status updates and comprehensive recruitment reports. This allows staff to monitor progress efficiently, access insights on applicant numbers and selection stages, and avoid time-consuming manual calculations—saving many work hours.

In Poland, only a few institutions offer licensed software of this kind, capable of supporting over 1,000 registered users annually. The system is thoughtfully designed with a user-friendly interface optimized for tablets and smartphones. Importantly, it combines the long-standing experience of staff in handling international admissions with a data-driven, analytical approach.

The system also automates key processes such as generating payment instructions, notifying

applicants of acceptance, and supporting multiple recruitment configurations. This flexibility allows administrators to tailor the application process based on specific criteria. However, a notable drawback is the potential incompatibility with the university's student information system (Dean's Office system). For this reason, a thorough analysis of technical capabilities is essential before implementation.



Internationalization at home

Internationalization is one of the key strategic challenges for the University of Łódź, and its success depends, among other factors, on having the necessary human resources to implement it effectively. The University of Lodz consistently ranks among the top Polish public universities in terms of the number of international students. In 2020 and 2021, UL held 3rd place in this category, and in 2022, according to GUS methodology, it ranked 4th—following the Jagiellonian University, the University of Warsaw, and, that year, Adam Mickiewicz University.

Today, the University of Lodz proudly welcomes over 2,000 international students representing around 95 nationalities. The university's corridors echo with a variety of languages and reflect a rich tapestry of cultural identities. This diversity fosters a vibrant, intercultural, and intergenerational academic community in Łódź—one that honors the city's best traditions. UL is committed to building a university environment that values and respects cultural, religious, and community identities, while promoting social sensitivity and inclusivity.

In recent years, the International Relations Office at UL has implemented several impactful projects, including:

- **“University Diversity”** (internally funded): initiatives such as poster sessions, the *“Christmas guest”* campaign, the *International Cook Book*, student guides, and *Diversity Days*.
- **SmartUni app**: awarded 2nd place in Europe in the EUPRIO competition for promotional tools.
- **Training projects** funded by NAWA under the *Build Up* and *Build Up 2.0* programmes: over 800 staff members trained in multiculturalism, English language skills, and working with international students.
- **Promotional projects** *UAktywni* and *UAktywni 2.0*: promoting UL's academic offer on the Ukrainian market, reaching over 2,100 potential candidates and 28 recruitment agencies.
- **Linked to UL**: a project focused on engaging international alumni, significantly enhancing the university's image. It included six Facebook campaigns featuring alumni stories tailored to their countries of origin, with a total reach of 2,896,645 views.

University Without Borders: marketing, tool and tips for international recruitment



On April 14–15, the University of Lodz hosted a unique conference focused on university promotion and the recruitment of international students. The event, titled *“University Without Borders: marketing, tools, and tips for international recruitment,”* was organized by the International Relations Office of UL and brought together speakers and guests from numerous Polish higher education institutions, both public and private. Discussions centered on innovative strategies for attracting students from around the world, the importance of flexibility in recruitment, and building a consistent and appealing university image.

A key theme of the conference was the adaptation of Polish universities to evolving legal and geopolitical conditions. Experts emphasized that success on the international stage requires a flexible recruitment approach and the ability to respond quickly to changing realities. As higher education in Poland continues to evolve, universities must rise to new challenges to remain attractive to global students.

The conference also served as a summary of the “Welcome Onboard” project, funded by the Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange (NAWA). Staff from the UL International Relations Office presented various initiatives developed under the project to support the adaptation of international students. These included the Onboarding course, the UL Mentor initiative, the Welcome Point space, and a range of integration events designed to help students feel at home.

One of the most inspiring parts of the event was the presentation by UL mentors—students of the University of Lodz—who shared their experiences supporting newly arrived students during their first weeks in Poland. As part of the project, a **Virtual Welcome Point** was created: a digital information hub offering international students access to essential details about academic life at UL. It includes comprehensive information on campus infrastructure, the university’s administrative structure, available scholarships, types of academic classes, and insights into student life.

More information about these initiatives can be found at the following links:

- [Virtual Welcome Point](#) – Your guide to the university
- [Welcome Point](#) – The first point of contact for international students at UL
- [UL Mentor initiative](#) – Support from experienced students
- [Onboarding](#) – An interactive introductory course

The “*University Without Borders*” conference provided a valuable platform for exchanging knowledge and experiences. It also served as a catalyst for further development of recruitment and promotional strategies that strengthen the position of Polish universities on the international academic stage.



Between 2023 and 2025, the International Relations Office at the University of Lodz implemented two projects under the Welcome to Poland programme: *Get on Board!* and *Welcome Onboard*. These efforts have led to the effective integration of international students into the academic environment at UL, tailored to the needs and expectations of the current generation. This was achieved

through both direct actions—such as the Virtual Welcome Point, on-site Welcome Point, onboarding course, and integration events like Welcome Days—and indirect actions, including the training of university staff to better support international students.

International Admission Staff Training Week 12-16 May 2025

The University of Lodz organized a training retreat in the “staff week” format for administrative staff from both international and domestic higher education institutions. Designed to facilitate the exchange of best practices, the event featured workshops and lectures on a wide range of topics, including the recognition of foreign educational documents, social media use, overviews of selected higher education systems, content marketing, onboarding activities, mentoring programmes, welcome point organization, double degree programmes, recruitment systems, and the use of artificial intelligence in education.

The event welcomed 32 participants from countries including Albania, Estonia, Greece, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Germany, Poland, South Africa, Romania, Türkiye, Italy, and Hungary.

Recruitment for the event began in autumn 2024, during which 49 applications were submitted. In addition to completing a standard personal data form, each applicant was required to submit a motivation statement and propose a topic they wished to present.

The programme included external experts who addressed subjects such as double degrees and micro-credentials, diversity in global education systems and its impact on recruitment, and content marketing from the perspective of international university promotion.

A satisfaction survey conducted after the event gathered responses from 22 participants (70%):

- 95% rated the event as “excellent,” with one rating it as “very good.”
- The diversity of topics was also highly appreciated: 60% rated it “excellent,” while the remaining 40% marked it as “very good” or “good.”
- The most valued topics were recruitment practices and onboarding, followed by promotion-related subjects such as content marketing, social media, and rebranding (brand communication design).

The survey revealed a mix of experienced professionals with over 11 years in higher education and newcomers just beginning their careers.

How would you describe your job?



Most universities represented at the event require recognition of foreign certificates during the admissions process. When asked to describe their work, most participants characterized it as “challenging.”

Additional insights from the survey included:

- 21 participants came from universities with more than 501 international students, while 10 represented institutions with fewer than 500.
- Most universities offer accommodation for international students.
- The annual tuition fee at most institutions ranges between 1,000 and 4,000 euros.
- Most universities offer more than 15 study programmes in English.
- In some cases, universities also assist applicants with their visa application process.

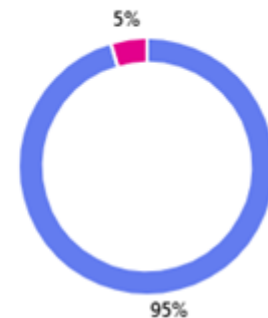
From which country comes the largest group of students at your Uni (type one country)?



In an anonymous evaluation survey, participants rated the Staff Week organized by the International Relations Office at the University of Lodz very highly, confirming the event's success and relevance.

1. How would you rate the overall organization of the training?

| | |
|-------------------|----|
| ● Excellent | 21 |
| ● Very good | 1 |
| ● Good | 0 |
| ● Satisfactory | 0 |
| ● Could be better | 0 |



Below are some comments from the participants:

Thank you once again for organising such an amazing staff week. I had the opportunity to meet wonderful people as well as learn about many crucial aspects of international students' admission.

It was a motivating experience that gave me more insights on many fields (ex. admissions). Although I do not specifically deal with International students admissions, I would like to work in that field in the future, so this staff week provided me with a lot of useful knowledge. Moreover, I found a lot of topics (ex. marketing, communication) to be useful for my area of expertise too (student services) and I hope to use what I have learned in my current job. I would also like to thank you and all the staff who made this staff week possible. I wish you all the best and I hope you can overcome all the challenges that you are facing currently: every setback is a setup for a comeback.

It was a memorable and perfectly organised Intensive Staff Week. I would like to thank the entire University of Lodz IRO Team for hosting and hospitality to make our stay so comfortable and enjoyable. We were pleased to visit different campuses of the university and enjoyed excellent presentations and lectures, discussions and workshops. We wish great prosperity to the University of Lodz!!!

It was a great week and I have learned a lot of new things, keep going with the good work!

It would have been nice to have some workshops instead of just presentations :)

The staff week was incredibly useful and enriching for me, providing valuable insights and inspiration. I've returned home full of fresh ideas that I'm eager to implement at my university.



Thank you!

#UniLodz

#getonboard

#universitydiversity

#freeyourmind

#polishuniversity

How does the University of Lodz support the integration of international students and staff?

- International Cook Book:
https://www.uni.lodz.pl/fileadmin/user_upload/Projekty/UNIVERSITY_DIVERSITY/InternationalCookBook_version2.pdf
- Christmas Guest: <https://www.uni.lodz.pl/aktualnosc/szczegoly/gosc-na-gwiazdke-2024-zaprosilismy-zagranicznych-studentow-ul-do-wigilijnych-stolow>
- Christmas dinner for international UL students:
<https://www.uni.lodz.pl/aktualnosc/szczegoly/tradycje-i-smaki-polskiej-wigilii-dla-zagranicznych-studentow-ul>
- Easter dinner: <https://www.uni.lodz.pl/aktualnosc/szczegoly/zagraniczni-studenci-ul-poznali-smaki-polskiej-wielkanocy> +
https://www.flickr.com/photos/promocja_ul/albums/72177720325158838/
- Welcome Meetings + BBQ: <https://www.uni.lodz.pl/aktualnosc/szczegoly/spotkania-powitalne-zagranicznych-studentow-ul> +
<https://www.facebook.com/reel/1349294462887525> +
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QPLnuJV-Km8> +
https://www.flickr.com/photos/promocja_ul/albums/72177720321093055/
- Welcome Point: <https://www.uni.lodz.pl/aktualnosc/szczegoly/rusza-welcome-point-ul-dla-studentow-zagranicznych> + <https://www.facebook.com/reel/863495755975187>
- UL Mentor initiative: <https://www.facebook.com/reel/583714987528173>
- Sports competitions: <https://www.facebook.com/reel/956149036565189>
- City games: <https://www.facebook.com/reel/1006400304155221>
- Pub quizzes: <https://www.facebook.com/reel/635764272404922> +
<https://www.facebook.com/reel/1141258367351496>
- Culinary workshops: <https://www.facebook.com/reel/2014144508999248>
- Staff Week:
https://www.flickr.com/photos/promocja_ul/albums/72177720326124196/ +
<https://www.uni.lodz.pl/aktualnosc/szczegoly/international-staff-week-na-ul>