

Doctoral Education in Poland

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1. Introduction

Poland has a long tradition in doctoral education, dating back to the 15th Century when such degrees were awarded at Jagiellonian University in Cracow. At present doctoral education takes place in both public and private universities, with over 33,000 students studying. There is a continuing academic tradition, emanating originally from Germany, of having two scientific degrees: the Doctorate and the ‘Habilitation’. The future of this tradition however is subject to debate in the context of pressures for European harmonization - specifically the Bologna process. Indeed, Poland like so many other countries in Europe and beyond faces significant transformation in the coming years as pressures to redefine the doctorate and its purposes and outcomes are addressed.

2. The Table¹

Question	Number	Comment
1. Total number of doctoral students studying ?	33,040	30,265 – public universities 2,775 – private universities. The data in the table are from 2004.
2. Number of institutions offering doctoral programmes?		
3. Number of different doctoral awards (e.g. including professional doctorates)?	2	Two kinds: regular PhD degree and PhD in the arts
4. Number of years over which doctorates have been offered in the country?	over 500	Since the 15th century (Jagiellonian University, Cracow)
5. <i>Proportion of Full-Time to Part-Time students?</i>	72 percent full-time, 28 percent part-time	23,027 full-time students to 8,949 part-time students
6. Average time to completion (in years)?	68.5 percent of	The statistical data show only the number of years passing since the date of the opening of

¹ All the data concerns the 2004 year.

	students complete their studies within 2 years; next 25 percent within 4 years; 4.6 percent within 6 years; and 1.9 percent longer than 6 years	the doctorate procedure. Usually doctoral students open doctorate procedure on the second or third year of doctoral studies
7. Success Rates		No data seem available; the probable drop-out rate is relatively small, no more than 10 percent in the public sector
8. Typical age range of doctoral candidates?	24-30	The vast majority of doctoral students begin doctoral studies right after graduation at (usually) 24 and studies last (on average) 4-5 years
9. Proportion of male/female students?	48.27 percent females	15,947 female students out of 33,040 in 2004
10. Proportion of doctoral students studying who are nationals of other countries?	1.5 percent	488 foreigners in total (289 in public universities and 199 in private institutions)

3. Data Source

Main Statistical Office, *Higher Education Institutions and Their Finances. 2004* (and previous years). Warsaw: GUS. 2005.

4. The Place of Doctoral Study in the National/International Context

4.1 The Place of the Doctorate within the Legislative Framework

The procedures concerning doctoral studies and conferring doctoral degrees in Poland are regulated by two laws. The precise information concerning doctoral studies is presented in Part IV (*Studies and Students*), chapter 3 (*Doctoral Programmes*) of the *Law on Higher*

Education (2005) and in chapter VI of *the Law on Scientific Degrees and the Scientific Title and on Degrees and the Title in the Area of Art* (2003). The precise rules concerning conferring doctoral degrees are presented in the latter law.

4.2 The Doctorate and the Habilitation

Two scientific degrees can be earned in Poland: the Doctorate and the Habilitation (the latter coming from the German academic tradition widely spread in Central Europe). In the Polish structure of higher education, the Habilitation opens the way from being a junior faculty member to becoming a senior faculty member; however, full seniority of rank is only achieved with the award of the scientific title of Professor. The Habilitation, however, opens the way for an academic to become a university professor (a university function, without a scientific title). Background information on numbers, sex, and distribution among disciplines of Doctorates is given and discussed below. In the Polish context, it may also be useful to combine these data with the data concerning the Habilitation.

Over the past four years, there have been significant discussions about the future of the Habilitation in the training of faculty and in the academic career in general. Although opinions have varied, the *status quo* with regard to the existence of the two scientific degrees has been maintained and may be promoted for future legislative projects, despite Bologna-related European pressures to have merely one degree in the academic career, the PhD. The strongest support for the abolition of the Habilitation seems to be coming from trade union circles, and the strongest opposition, from senior faculty who fear an (apparently unavoidable) lowering of academic standards (at least for as long as the standards for Doctoral dissertations are not simultaneously raised).

4.3 Numbers of Doctoral Degrees Awarded

The numbers of all Doctoral degrees (and Habilitations) awarded in Poland in 2004, in higher education institutions, institutes of the Polish Academy of Sciences, and in research and development institutes amounted to 5,314 and 830, respectively. It should be noted that perhaps 80,000 people in Poland are believed to hold PhD degrees, with the increase of 4,000 – 5,500 every year in the 2000s. Of these, slightly more than 41,000 were working in public higher education institutions in 1999 and the situation has not changed dramatically. Although people holding PhD degrees are distributed among higher education institutions and research institutions and can be found in the industry and administration, the principal places in which Doctorates are concentrated are public higher education institutions.

4.4 Stipends

In the Polish higher education system, in fact, Doctoral students rank between students and junior academic faculty. They have some of the privileges of faculty members; however, their social security coverage is the same as that of students and they do not receive regular salaries. Contributions to their pension schemes are not paid. Less than half of all Doctoral students receive state-funded Doctoral stipends, on a competitive basis, but with exemption from taxation. At the same time, Doctoral students have poor chances of being employed after graduation in the public academic sector, for the number of positions available is very low in the vast majority of disciplines. The total amount of academics in Poland has only slightly

risen in the last ten years, despite huge increases in the number of both students and doctoral students.

5. Funding Issues

5.1 The Funding of Institutions

According to the Law on Higher Education, a public higher education institution receives state subsidies for: (i) tasks related to the teaching of full-time doctoral students and (ii) tasks related to non-reimbursable financial support for doctoral students. Also a non-public (or private) higher education institution may be granted a subsidy for the tasks related to non-reimbursable financial support for doctoral students and it also may be granted a subsidy to cover a part of fees paid by full-time doctoral students.

5.2 The Funding of Students

According to the Law, “*doctoral students may be awarded financial support in the form of: (i) a maintenance grant, (ii) an aid payment, (iii) a scholarship for learning achievements, (iv) a meals grant, (v) an accommodation grant, (vi) a special grant for disabled persons.*” Additionally only full-time doctoral students may be awarded doctoral scholarships, which are funded by state-budget subsidy.

There were 12,224 doctoral scholarships and 1,134 doctor’s scholarships (for assistants without PhD degrees already employed in higher education institutions) in 2004. 112 and 47 of them, respectively, were awarded in private higher education institutions.

It is worth mentioning that it is in the last few years that noticeable gradual growth of subsidies for doctoral students offered by local authorities and foundations has been observed.

6. Kinds of Institution

6.1 Institutions within the National Framework

Doctoral programmes are offered by academic institutions, research and development institutes and units of the Polish Academy of Sciences. According to the *Law on Higher Education* “*organizational units of a higher education which are authorized to confer either the academic degree of habilitated doctor or the academic degree of PhD in at least two different disciplines of a given area of science may provide doctoral programmes in the corresponding disciplines.*” Only those academic units (institutions, faculties, departments) which employ in a full-time mode at least eight academics with the scientific title of professor or that of habilitated doctor in a given discipline have the right to confer doctoral degrees.

In Poland, Doctoral degrees are primarily awarded in top public academic institutions – with universities in the lead – followed by technical universities and academies of medicine. The quantitative trend is that of a large increase in both the numbers of Doctoral students and of degrees awarded. The numbers of Doctoral students increased twelve times between 1990 and 2004: from 2,700 in 1990, to 10,500 in 1995, and to 33,000 in 2004. Also the numbers of Doctorates awarded increased almost four times in the same period: from 1,500, in 1991, to 2,300, in 1995, and 4,400 in 2000, to 5,700 in 2004.

At the same time, the number of undergraduate and graduate students in both the public and the private sectors of higher education increased almost five times (from 403,800 to 1,926,000 in 2004, the trend being clearly stopped in 2004 and 2005 in comparison with radical growth in previous years). The number of Doctoral students at the Polish Academy of Sciences is relatively small compared to the number in educational institutions – it is only 4.92 percent (1,625 doctorate students in 2004), as is the number of Doctoral students in research institutes – 2.14 percent (708 doctorate students in 2004). Consequently, the number of doctorates awarded at the Polish Academy of Sciences is relatively small as well, compared to the number of doctorates awarded in educational institutions – 2.8 percent (162 doctorates awarded), as is the number of Doctoral students in research institutes – 4.3 percent (246 doctorates awarded).

6.2 The Organisation of Awarding Institutions

Doctoral programmes are organized by departments or faculties of eligible academic institutions. In general, there are no graduate schools to run doctoral programmes: doctoral studies are offered as a continuation of postgraduate studies, for top graduates based on very strict selection procedures. Within the Bologna process, and based on the new law of 2005, doctoral students are third-cycle students at the university (the previous cycles being BA and MA, with the real distinction introduced only in recent years).

7. Forms of Doctoral Study

There are two kinds of doctoral degrees – a scientific degree and a degree in a given domain of arts. No professional doctorates are possible within current legislation. So the only difference is between doctoral degrees conferred in academies of fine arts and in all other (eligible) academic institutions.

8. Students and their Programmes of Study

8.1 Requirements of Doctoral Students

The Law on Higher Education states that: “*Access to doctoral programmes shall be open to a person who holds the MA degree or an equivalent degree and fulfills the admission conditions laid down by a given higher education institution*”. Usually there is the requirement of meeting the minimal level of average marks during the period of study (usually 4,00 - in the mandatory Polish scale from 2,0 failed, to the maximum of 5,0, very good). Because of the number of candidates which is usually higher than that of places available (both with or without scholarships), there are usually oral introductory/entrance exams, where the institutional admission committee consisting of professors of a given institute evaluate candidates partly on the basis of their hitherto accomplishments (studies and M.A. theses), partly on the basis of the evaluation of their doctorate proposals.

8.2 Periods of Study

Officially there are four years of doctoral studies in Poland (the scholarship can be taken during four years only). But firstly, universities treat differently students who have got

scholarship abroad (a doctoral scholarship is suspended during the leave of absence abroad). Some universities include that time to the general four-year period, other universities do not. And secondly, quite often the rector agrees to extend the studying period on so-called “fifth year” with all doctoral student privileges maintained (especially without the necessity of paying the costs for the doctorate defense procedure, which has to be paid by all external candidates), but without scholarships.

8.3 Modes of Study

There are officially two kinds of doctoral studies: full-time programmes and part-time programmes. As the Law clearly states, *“more than a half of the curriculum of a full-time doctoral programme shall require the presence of participants therein in the organizational unit providing the programme and shall comprise courses and research work requiring direct participation of academic staff or research tutors and doctoral students. Part-time doctoral programmes shall be organised in such a way as to ensure that doctoral programmes may be followed by persons in an employment relationship.”* In public higher education institutions no tuition fees are charged for full-time doctoral studies, but it can be charged for part-time doctoral programmes (especially in such lucrative areas of studies as e.g. economics).

8.4 Scholarships/Internships

There are two kinds of students on a full-time doctoral programmes: with scholarship (who cannot hold additionally any permanent job, both full time and part-time) and without scholarship (this group consist of two kinds of students: firstly, students who have a post and do not want scholarships, and secondly, students who have not received scholarships because the number of them is too small compared with the number of those students accepted in entrance exams group of students; usually some of them get scholarship one or two years later, already after official opening of the doctorate procedure). The Law clarifies that *“doctoral students shall also be required to undertake internships involving the teaching of the courses or participation in the teaching courses. The maximum teaching load for participants in doctoral programmes may not exceed 90 teaching hours per year”* (with the standard workload at universities being 210 for junior and 180 for senior staff). In practice, usually the above cited law is executed only towards full-time students who have hold scholarships, and only they are obliged to conduct 90 teaching hours. Also fee-paying part-time students do not provide teaching in their institutions.

8.5 Career Destinations

Current research on Doctoral students in some areas (especially part-time fee-paying studies), indicates that only 20 percent of them are interested in pursuing academic careers. The remaining 80 percent may want to bring advanced credentials to the labor market or, more often, do not have any idea as to what they want to do in professional life, hoping to have additional time in which to choose (a widespread feeling of “negative selection” exists for Doctoral studies in certain disciplines; in other, more marketable disciplines, paid Doctoral studies exist, in which the expected level of achievement of Doctoral students is very low and no exceptional abilities are required). Very few Doctoral students are interested in academic teaching. It is different in the area of humanities, where most doctoral students would like to continue their research in academic institutions.

An academic career in Poland today does not offer exciting job prospects in terms of remuneration and available research funding (the academic salary for full professor gross in 2005 is approx. 1,800 EUR, the average salary for junior staff is about 600 EUR gross). The labour market for new PhDs in some disciplines is much larger abroad (especially in the United States) than in Poland – a situation that leads to the brain drain. Even though the number of Doctoral students increased twelve times between 1990 and 2004, the number of academic staff members over that period did not increase substantially, compared with the growth in the number of students and doctoral students in the same period of time, with adverse consequences for chances for starting academic careers. Nevertheless the faculty number grew from 66,973 in the academic year 1995/96 to 85,760 in academic year 2003/04), that is almost 30 percent within a decade. As a result, the chances of new Doctorate-holders to obtain employment in higher education institutions or academies of sciences are limited. While a decade ago, PhDs were produced mainly for academe, their holders now, in most cases, must seek employment outside of the academic market.

8.6 Gender Issues in Doctoral Education

There are no gender issues in relation to doctoral programmes. Presently almost half of the doctoral students are women (48.3 percent; see the table at the beginning). Almost the same proportion can be found between students who completed doctorate (47 percent of females). But it should be stressed that on the next level of academic career – habilitation – the proportion of females to males is only 30 percent to 70 percent. The higher the academic level, the proportions of women are lower (as in most European countries).

8.7 Social Issues in Doctoral Education

Polish society is homogeneous, and in this sense there are no race issues in relation to doctoral programmes. There are only 1.5 percent foreign students (488 persons) of all doctoral students, but statistics information concerning the race of doctoral recipients is not collected. Forty three percent of foreign students in 2004 were students of Polish origin. Among other nations represented, young people from neighbouring countries like Ukraine, Belarus or the Baltics dominate. There can be mentioned also a small group of students from Central and South-east Asia.

It is worth mentioning that Faculties of Theology at public universities (earlier – during communism - separate academies, which were attached to universities only during the last 10 years) are always Roman-Catholic theological faculties under the essential supervision of archbishops proper to the area where the university is located.

9. Supervision

There is always one official scientific supervisor of a doctoral candidate who is proposed and elected during the opening of the doctorate procedure. The acceptance of the function of a professor conferring a degree, as well as that of reviewer of a doctorate thesis, is according to the law a duty of the academic teacher. He or she is fully responsible for the academic development and progress of a doctorate candidate. But additionally candidates every year have to present written information (including positive opinion of supervisor) concerning the progress of their work to the director of the doctorate studies in the relevant department or

faculty. Students with scholarships who have to teach students are also supervised by the deputy director for teaching in the department.

10. Examination

The procedure is strictly described by the law and consists of five steps.

10.1 The First Step

Usually during the second or third year of doctoral studies, the candidate officially opens his doctorate procedure in the front of the Scientific Council of the Faculty or sometimes of the Department (only scientifically very strong departments get the right to conduct doctorate procedures, usually it takes place in the front of the faculty Council). The law strictly says that *“eligible to take part in the voting shall be members of the board of the organizational unit concerned holding the academic title of professor or the academic degree of the doctor habilitated”*. The candidate proposes the exact theme of a doctorate, presents its main thesis in speech of approximately ten minutes and then he or she is obliged to answer questions posed by professors who are members of the Council. After discussion, the Council votes about the opening of the doctorate; if positive, the Council follows three steps: firstly, designates a professor conferring a degree who has to be a person holding the academic title of professor or the academic degree of doctor habilitated in a given or related area of science or art; secondly the Council usually designates from its members a Doctorate Commission (approx. six to seven professors), and decides on the names of three examiners for the three obligatory doctoral exams (in the doctorate subject, in related subject chosen by the candidate from the established list, and in a foreign language).

10.2 The Second Step

When the doctoral thesis is ready and accepted by the doctoral supervisor and all three doctoral exams are already passed, a Doctorate Commission accepts it and proposes to the Scientific Council the closing of the doctorate and the designation of two reviewers. Scientific Council votes the closing of the doctorate and - if positive - designates two specialist in the field of doctorate as reviewers: according to the law *“at least two reviewers shall be appointed for the procedure leading to the conferment of the academic degree of doctor [...] including not more than one who is employed in the same higher education institution or another research institution where the candidate for the degree of doctor is employed, or who is the member of the board of the organizational unit conducting the procedure”* (they have three months for writing the review).

10.3 The Third Step

When the Doctorate Commission receives two positive reviews and accepts them, it recommends to the Scientific Council the acceptance of the doctorate thesis and fixes the date of public defense of the doctorate thesis.

10.4 The Fourth Step

The defence of the doctorate thesis takes place in the front of the members of Doctorate Commission which is for that occasion accompanied by the director of a faculty (or

department), the supervisor and both reviewers. The defense of doctorate is open to the public, but in the final stage only the members of a Commission has the right to vote. The defense starts with the 20-30 minutes speech of a candidate who presents main accomplishments of his doctorate thesis. Then both reviewers present their reviews and state questions to the candidate. In the third step a candidate answers to the remarks or criticism present in the reviews and answers the questions of reviewers. In the next step members of the Commission put questions and everybody from the public also can put questions. Then candidate answers the questions. Finally Commission votes acceptance of public defence of doctorate, and if affirmative recommends to the Scientific Council conferring a doctoral degree.

10.5 The Fifth Step

During a closed session of the Scientific Council, the recommendation is voted and if affirmative, the Council confers a doctoral degree. The conferment of the degree takes effect immediately.

11. Other Issues

It is important to remember that it is only the second academic degree, the Habilitation degree, which opens the way to become a senior academic and gives the right to become a university professor (except for the arts). Academics with PhD degrees in Poland are at the lower end of academic careers – while a decade ago MA graduates were offered jobs at the best Polish universities, today the requirement is to be a PhD holder. The average time needed to get a Habilitation degree has been 8-10 years. All corporate privileges at the university begin with the latter degree: voting rights, the rights to supervise MA and PhD theses and to be a reviewer of them, to head sub-units of departments etc.

12. Critical Comments

PhD studies in Poland are about to undergo a huge transformation in the coming years. While for decades they have been focused on producing young academics for the academic sector, with the fantastic increase in numbers, they can no longer be treated as such. While the national system was able to accommodate 1,500 doctoral recipients 15 years ago or over 2,000 doctoral recipients ten years ago, it seem impossible in the private sector to accommodate almost 6,000 of them in 2004 and beyond. The solution might be academic jobs in private higher education institutions, or remodeling of doctoral studies so that they could be more useful to the non-academic labor market. Additionally, if the habilitation degree is to be discarded in the next 5-10 years (which, within the processes of the Europeanization of Polish higher education may be the case), the role of PhD studies and PhD degree has to be dramatically changed, and their academic standards have to be increased. As elsewhere in Europe, the academic profession in Poland no longer provides exciting career prospects although it is still both highly valued and viewed as desirable and promising by the society at large.

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