

Doctoral Supervision in Poland: Regulations, Good Practices, and Challenges

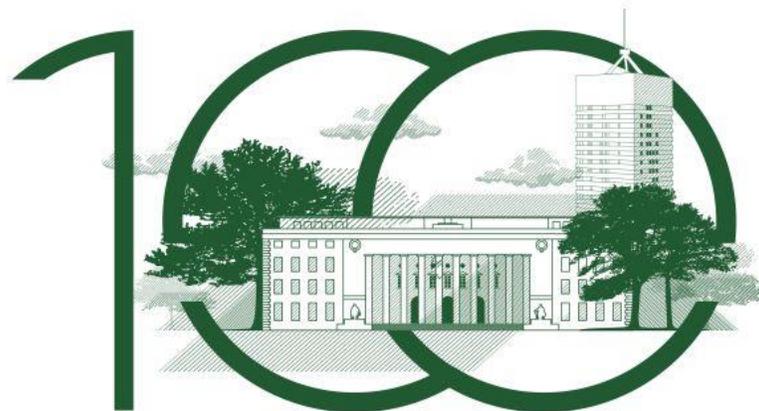
University of Latvia, Riga, 13th March 2026

Tomasz Jewartowski

tomasz.jewartowski@ue.poznan.pl

Katarzyna Szarzec

Katarzyna.Szarzec@ue.poznan.pl



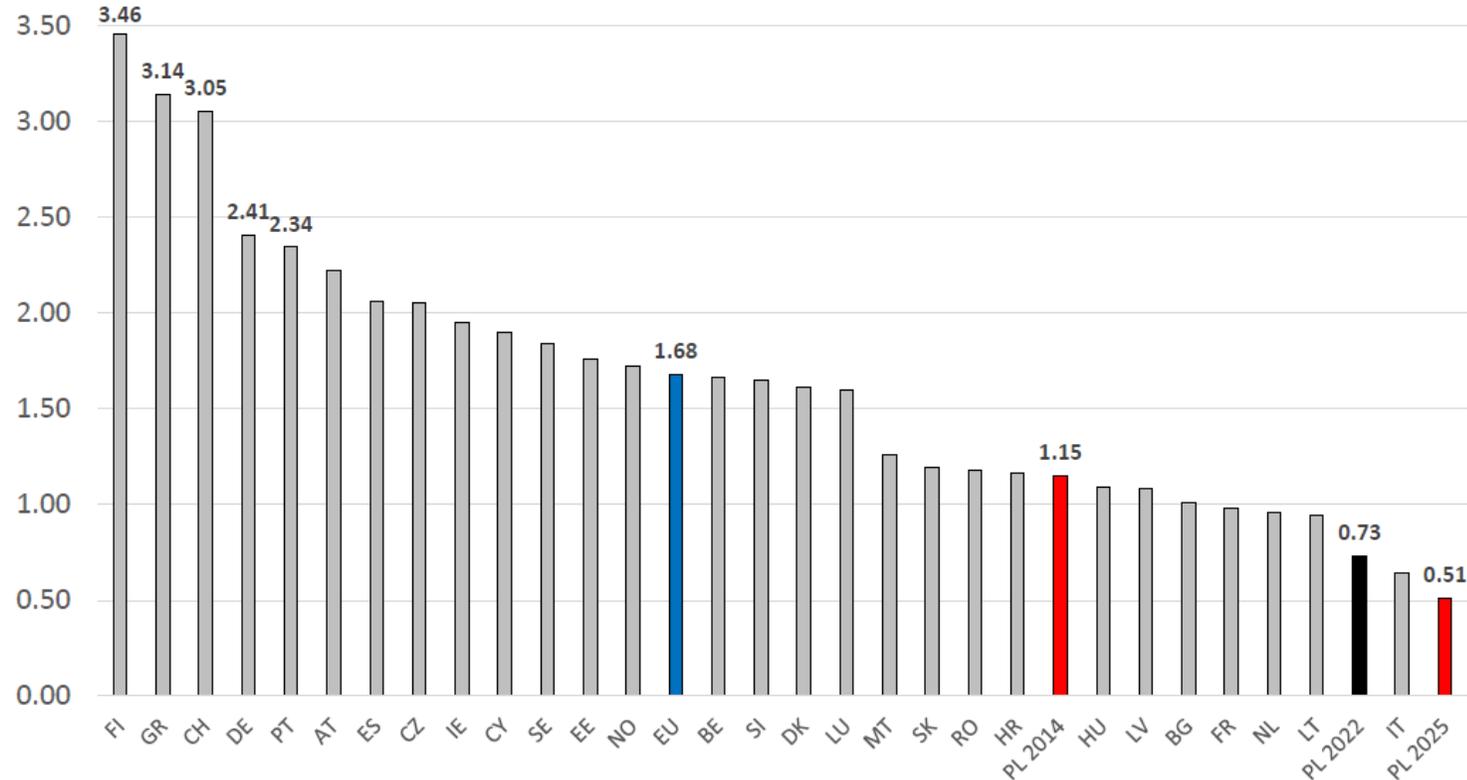
New Polish Law on Higher Education and Science (effective in 2019):

- introducing **doctoral schools** (October 1st, 2019)
- universities can **no longer offer part-time** doctoral studies
- universities can run doctoral schools **only** within the disciplines in which they obtain a grade of at least **B+** (in a five-level scale: A+,A,B+,B,C) from the Ministry of Education and Science
- introducing **alternative path** for a doctoral degree (extramural mode)

General rules of education in doctoral schools in Poland

- **admission** conducted by way of competition based on interviews
- **no tuition fee** (also for foreigners)
- **6 or 8 semesters**
- doctoral students receive **scholarships**
- doctoral students submit an individual research plan by the 1st year
- doctoral students are **evaluated** by a committee after the 2nd year
- education ends with a **PhD dissertation** submitted by the end of the 6th or 8th semester to the Academic Advancement Board (*as a monograph or a series of papers*)

Doctoral students in EU per 1000 citizens (2022)



Source: Eurostat

PhD Students in Poland (2024):

- Total No. – **19,100**
- Foreign PhD C. (%) – **2,585 (13.5%)**
- PhD S. by s.fields:
 - exact/natural – 4,750 (24.8%)
 - tech./engeen. – 4,550 (23.8%)
 - social s. – 3,485 (18.2%)
 - medical s. – 2,680 (14.0%)
 - humanities – 2,270 (11.9%)
 - life s. – 680 (3.5%)
 - other (incl. arts) – 690 (3.6%)

Success rate:

- before 2019 – app. **30-40%**
- after 2019 – app. **60-70%**

Main reason:

- no part-time doctoral studies

PhD student and Supervisor

- **Master and Student**
- **First, Science! Research matters! Intellectual autonomy!**
- **Ideal PhD student:** hard-working, ambitious, motivated, committed to science, having scientific curiosity, be prepared for criticism/ improvement, enthusiastic about work/ science
- **Ideal PhD supervisor:** hard-working, ambitious, motivated, committed to science, having scientific curiosity, be prepared for criticism/ improvement, enthusiastic about work/ science
 - but also supervisor should: *supervise research work; include students in his research activities; integrate into the academic environment; share professional contacts; advise on conferences, workshops, and scholarships; support the acquisition of research funding.*

Supervisors of PhD students – requirements:

- **Obligatory, by the law:**
 - Phd habilitation degree and scientific achievements related to the research topic of the doctoral dissertation.
 - No more than 2 failed defenses or 4 failed mid-term assessments (an obligatory 5-year break!)
- **Additional requirements introduced by some universities:**
 - proven experience in an auxiliary supervisory role
 - experience as a scientific project manager or participation as an investigator in scientific research projects
 - published papers in leading journals within last 5 years
 - assessment and approval by the university's scientific committee (a selected group of supervisors)
 - a limited number of PhD students per supervisor, e.g.: no more than one PhD student per a year cohort, and maximum four PhD students supervised simultaneously

Candidate to Doctoral School – requirements:

- **Obligatory, by the law:**
 - Master degree, Bachelor degree only in case of outstanding scientific achievements of a candidate
 - Admission conducted by way of competition based on rules established and announced by universities
- **Admission procedures and requirements depending on universities:**
 - Scientific achievements (publications, conferences)
 - A concept of PhD thesis – its assessment by a scientific committee
 - Interview with a scientific committee
 - Exams – in the case of admissions organized for specified projects (used to verify the knowledge and skills required for the tasks within a given project)

University / Doctoral School – requirements:

- **Obligatory, by the law:**
 - The right to grant doctoral degrees in at least two scientific disciplines
- **University specific:**
 - Academic staff (teachers, researchers, supervisors)
 - Infrastructure (labs, libraries, software, databases)
 - Doctoral programme
 - Reliable admission procedure

PhD student and supervisor – starting / appointing

- **The Law:** appointment of the supervisor (s) by the Faculty Council within 3 months from the beginning of education
- **Who chooses who? Solutions by the universities:**
 - A candidate to Doctoral School chooses a potential supervisor during the admission procedure -> gets her approval after being admitted -> Faculty Council accepts it
 - A candidate is admitted for a given research project conducted by a group of researchers – a project coordinator becomes a supervisor

PhD students - requirements

Mandatory activities

- preparing the Individual Research Plan (2nd sem.)
- attending and passing all mandatory courses (all semesters)
- reporting on the progress made (after each semester or a year)
- passing the **mid-term assessment** (4th semester)
- submitting the dissertation (8th semester)
- teaching duties (e.g. 15 hours per year, maximum 60 h per year, depending on the University)

Recommended/ voluntary activities

- attending joint lectures, ad-hoc organized seminars and workshops
- attending scientific conferences (also presenting the dissertation concept at doctoral session)
- presenting scientific achievements at department meetings
- applying for grants and scholarships (internationally)

The role of supervisors

- **Support in shaping research skills of PhD Student:**
 - The PhD student should **acquire the competencies necessary for conducting independent, high-quality research** in accordance with the standards of the scientific community
 - The supervisor shall act as a mentor **ensuring the transfer of appropriate standards of academic behaviour**, ethical principles, and rules governing effective scientific collaboration
 - The supervisor shall support the PhD student in developing attitudes conducive to **responsible research practice**, including reliability, integrity, independence, critical thinking, and respect for the principles of academic cooperation
- **Integration of PhD Student into the Academic Environment:**
 - Facilitating the PhD student's active participation in academic seminars, scientific conferences, and research internships.
 - Providing support in securing external funding sources for scientific research.
 - Assisting in the establishment of professional connections within the academic community.

Standards of supervision

- **No specific standards set as obligatory rules given by law.**
- **Supervisors are remunerated for:**
 - Conducting **doctoral seminars**, which in most Polish universities comprise app. 10-15 hours per semester
 - Success-based remuneration awarded to a supervisor upon the **successful defence** of the doctoral dissertation, amounting to approximately 80% of the monthly salary of a full professor
- **Universities apply different practices of setting the standards of supervision:**
 - **Codes of conduct** governing the relationship between doctoral candidates and supervisors (*e.g., should PhD students attend classes conducted by their supervisors, etc.*)
 - **Formal agreements** or contracts concluded between the doctoral candidate and the supervisor

Standards of supervision - example

Some Polish universities adopted a semi-formal agreement between a supervisor and a PhD student **based on a questionnaire** filled in by both sides and jointly agreed under the supervision of doctoral school authorities.

Sample question:

The supervisor should provide the doctoral student with emotional support and should constantly motivate them to set and achieve new goals.

1. *Strongly agree*
2. *Agree*
3. *To some extent*
4. *Rather not*
5. *Absolutely not*

Good practises, guidelines for supervisors:

- **Early engagement** with the candidate - preferably before the recruitment process to become acquainted with the candidate, her motivation, capabilities, and prior experience
- **Defining the principles of cooperation** and the expectations of both parties – including academic responsibilities, availability, and the preferred method and frequency of communication
- Helping preparing the **research plan corresponding with PhD student's interests and capabilities**
- Helping with **integration into the academic environment** - encourage PhD students to engage in academic life (meetings, seminars, and discussion forums)
- **Discussion of risk factors** and milestones of a PhD thesis – in order to mitigate risk and find alternative solutions - PhD thesis must be feasible
- Be **open for but careful with international candidates** – cultural differences matter
- Be aware of **generation Z** attitudes and preferences
- **Engage in professional development** – both early-career and experienced supervisors; they should constantly improve not only their scientific but also **soft skills**
- **React fast to have any conflicts solved ASAP** - in cases of severe conflicts, mediation options should be used.

Good practises, guidelines for Doctoral School:

- Good curriculum:
 - specialty courses
 - research-based courses: designing research, research methods, research ethics, intellectual property rights, publishing workshops, academic writing, public presentations, collaboration in research teams, etc.
- Meetings with candidates (open day)
- Meetings with candidates for supervisors!
- Regular meetings with PhD students in given cohorts
- Additional activities for PhD students to enable networking
- Surveys of quality of supervisors' work at the end of education
- **Trainings for supervisors**
- **Apply more or less formal procedures of resolving conflicts between PhD students and supervisors**

Final conclusions

- The quality of the doctoral school depends on the **scientific level of the University**, the **appropriate selection of supervisors**, and the **intellectual potential of the doctoral candidates**
- Supervisory responsibility **derives directly from the responsibility of the University**
- Regulations concerning supervisor qualifications, their professional development, and the procedures governing supervisory work should be established at the **university / faculty level**
- Such regulations and procedures must **not lead to excessive bureaucratisation**

