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*Where can a doctoral student search for support in issues related to doctoral school education?*



In the course of education at a doctoral school, doctoral students may face a number of problems not only in interpreting the legal regulations set forth in the Law on Higher Education and Science (i.e., Journal of Laws of 2023, item 742, as amended), hereafter referred to as "PSWiN," the relevant regulations of the doctoral school or the educational program, but also difficulties of a practical nature concerning, for example, the appearance of unexpected difficulties in terms of conducting scientific research, irregularities in the relationship with the supervisor, or inadequacy of the organization of education to meet the needs of, for example, doctoral students who do not speak Polish.

Doctoral students often try to solve the problem that has arisen on their own without being aware that there are authorities and units in each doctoral institution where they can look for help. First of all, it is important to note the role of the doctoral students' self-government and the authorities and administrative staff of the doctoral school in supporting doctoral students during the educational process at the doctoral school. In addition, it is worth emphasizing the fact that doctoral entities can create special bodies and units whose task is to offer assistance to doctoral students as well, e.g., university Doctoral Ombudsmen or student and doctoral student support centers. In this article, it is also impossible not to emphasize the not inconsiderable role of the institution of the Doctoral Student Ombudsman of the Polish Association of Doctoral Candidates in supporting the doctoral community.

It follows from Article 110(3) in conjunction with Article 215(2) of the PSWiN that the doctoral students' self-government is the exclusive representative of all doctoral students of the doctoral school entity. This means that it is the elected representatives of doctoral students participating in the work of the doctoral students' self-government who represent the doctoral community both before the bodies of the doctoral school entity and organizations of doctoral students (M. Klimczyk, M. Wilanowska, Commentary to Article 215 of the PSWiN, [in:] W. Kielbasiński, B. Pietrzyk-Tobiasz, M. Kuliński (ed), Prawo o szkolnictwie wyższym i nauki dla studenta i doktoranta - komentarz praktyczny, Warsaw 2024).

Doctoral students studying at a doctoral school may therefore bring to the attention of the doctoral student self-government the need to enter into discussions with the authorities of the doctoral entity in order to resolve certain difficulties in the implementation of the educational process or to introduce solutions that are more beneficial to the doctoral community. The regulations of the doctoral students' self-government should also specify the objectives of the self-government's activities.



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The catalog of objectives set forth in this legal act should definitely not lack such directions of activities as providing doctoral students with the necessary assistance and collegial cooperation, as well as supporting their scientific activity and self-government activation. This is because doctoral students of a given doctoral entity should feel that they can address to the doctoral student self-government any problem related to the educational process and activity in academia and will not be ignored.

Doctoral students at doctoral schools can also seek support from the authorities and administrative staff of doctoral schools. This is because the doctoral school should provide the doctoral student with adequate conditions for the implementation of the educational program and Individual Research Plan, and, therefore, also assistance in case of any problems that arise during the training process. It is worth noting that in accordance with §2 of the Regulation of the Minister of Education and Science of September 27, 2021 on the evaluation of the quality of education at a doctoral school (Journal of Laws of 2021, item 1847), one of the specific criteria for the evaluation of doctoral schools in terms of the quality of scientific or artistic care and support in conducting scientific activity is verification of whether doctoral students, including doctoral students with disabilities and doctoral students who are parents, proper conditions, as well as support in the implementation of the educational program and individual research plans and preparation of dissertations, including provision of access to the necessary infrastructure.

It is also worth noting that in recent years, university authorities and doctoral student councils have increasingly decided to appoint a local Doctoral Student Ombudsman or Student and Doctoral Student Ombudsman. Such actions should undeniably be considered examples of good practice in the protection of doctoral students' rights in individual doctoral entities. This is because ombudsmen can assist doctoral students not only in matters concerning problems in the doctoral student-promoter relationship, but also cooperate actively with the doctoral students' self-government in order to introduce certain changes in the rules and regulations of doctoral schools and educational and to prepare joint initiatives and training for the benefit of the doctoral community. The Ombudsman for Student and Doctoral Student Rights has been appointed, among others, at the University of Silesia in Katowice, the Silesian Medical University in Katowice, the Pomeranian Medical University and the Medical University of Lodz. The institution of the Ombudsman for Doctoral Students, on the other hand, functions at the University of Lodz, Cracow University of Technology and the University of Bialystok, among others.

Doctoral students at all universities and institutes can also benefit from the assistance of the Doctoral Student Ombudsman of the Polish Association of Doctoral Candidates. This institution has been functioning since 2006. The Doctoral Student Ombudsman upholds the rights of doctoral students arising from generally applicable laws and internal legal acts of doctoral entities.





The Doctoral Student Ombudsman provides legal support to doctoral students in the field of higher education and science, undertakes mediation and clarification activities in individual cases, as well as issues opinions and recommendations on issues related to doctoral education. Legal assistance provided by the Ombudsman for Doctoral Students is free of charge.

Many doctoral entities also have additional units that provide representatives of the academic community with psychological assistance or aimed at eliminating difficulties in the education of persons with special needs. These include Offices for Persons with Disabilities or Academic Support Centers.

In conclusion, it should be pointed out that PhD school students can access a number of opportunities for support in matters relating to their education and undertaking scientific activities, doubts about the interpretation of legislation, or the occurrence of difficulties that prevent them from properly implementing their educational program and Individual Research Plan. Before starting education at a particular doctoral school, it is certainly a good idea to verify which solutions are provided by a particular doctoral entity.



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