



---

## *Doctorate at the Doctoral School vs Extramural Mode*



### **Doctorate at the Doctoral School vs Extramural Mode**

Obtaining a doctoral degree is one of the highest educational achievements, requiring many years of commitment, research efforts and a deep understanding of the subject. There are two paths to obtaining a doctoral degree: education at the Doctoral School and preparation of a dissertation in an extramural mode. From this article you will learn about these two forms of obtaining a doctoral degree are, what their characteristic attributes are and the basic differences between them.

### **Doctoral School as the basic path for doctoral dissertation**

Doctoral School is an organized form of education offering a specific program for candidates who want to obtain a doctoral degree. Each Doctoral School is run in at least two disciplines. The exception are schools run in the discipline of art, physical culture or theology, but they must have an academic category of at least B+. The fundamental regulations regarding the functioning of Doctoral Schools and the general principles of doctoral candidates education are contained in the Act of July 20, 2018, Law on Higher Education and Science (consolidated text: Journal of Laws of 2023, item 742, as amended, hereinafter referred to as: PSWiN) and the implementing acts issued on its basis. However, the extremely important role is played by the regulations of Doctoral Schools. These are acts that regulate in detail the principles of organizing the education of doctoral students in each doctorate-granting entity. The education model at Doctoral Schools provides for programs lasting 6 to 8 semesters, based on an Individual Research Plan, Doctoral School regulations and a training programme. Doctorate-granting institutions may provide for the obligation to carry out teaching internships (Article 201 and 202 of PSWiN). Professional practice cannot exceed 60 teaching hours per year and consists in conducting or co-conducting teaching classes.

It is worth emphasizing that in accordance with Article 209(4) of PSWiN, a person studying at a Doctoral School receives a scholarship of at least:

- 37% of the professor's salary – up to the month in which the mid-term evaluation was conducted,
- 57% of the professor's salary - after the month in which the mid-term evaluation was conducted.

From January 1, 2024, these gross amounts are PLN 3,467.00 and PLN 5,341.00. Since these amounts constitute the minimum rate of the doctoral scholarship, the entity running the Doctoral School may independently increase the amount of the scholarship.



---

At this point, it is worth recalling the postulate of the Polish National Association of Doctoral Candidates regarding an appeal for increase the amount of doctoral scholarships by entities running Doctoral Schools, promoted by the #UnasPodnieśli (#TheyRaisedItHere) campaign. It should be noted that the doctoral scholarship can be received for a period no longer than 4 years. This is important in terms of the possibility of extending the submission of the doctoral dissertation for another two years in the cases specified in the regulations of the Doctoral School. During the extension of education, the doctoral candidate does not receive a doctoral scholarship.

In addition to the doctoral scholarship, a person studying at the Doctoral School has the status of a doctoral candidate, thanks to which he or she also has many privileges. These include: the right to rest breaks of up to 8 weeks per year and the period of study at the Doctoral School to be included in the period of work on which employee entitlements depend (Article 208(1-3) of PSWiN), the right to apply for a student loan (Article 210 of PSWiN), the right to accommodation in a student dormitory or catering in the student canteen of the higher education institution (Article 211 PSWiN), the right to possible additional scholarships awarded by local government units (Article 212 PSWiN) and for academic or sports results (Article 213 PSWiN), discounts on public transport fares (Article 214 of PSWiN) – the discount depends on the local self-government unit so before you travel by public transport in another city, don't forget to check what discount is available to the ones with the status of a doctoral candidates in this area and what are the age restrictions; as well as the right to associate in doctoral candidates organizations (Article 216 of PSWiN) and the creation of doctoral candidates self-government (Article 215 of PSWiN). Moreover, according the Social Insurance System ACT of October 13th 1998, candidates studying at the Doctoral School have the right to health care services and are subject to compulsory retirement, disability and accident insurance.

Candidates studying at the Doctoral School prepare a dissertation under the supervision of a supervisor (Article 190(1) of PSWiN). They also have the opportunity to apply for assistant supervisor. This is extremely useful while doing an interdisciplinary work combining different areas of knowledge, where more than one specialist in a given field is needed. A doctoral candidate is obliged to participate in a doctoral seminar, during which he or she can benefit from the help and guidance of his or her scientific supervisor. In addition, the Doctoral School provides access to the necessary research infrastructure, including laboratories, libraries, computer software and other resources necessary to conduct research.

Education at the Doctoral School also fulfills the obligation to obtain learning outcomes at level 8 of the Polish Qualifications Framework (PQF), necessary to apply for a doctoral degree (Article 186(1)(2) of PSWiN). PQF is a tool describing the qualification levels achieved in the Polish system based on the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). The aim of this system is to make it easier to compare qualifications between different European countries.



---

This facilitates the verification of qualifications achieved, and thus facilitates educational and professional mobility between countries. Thanks to obtaining learning outcomes at PQF level 8, people graduating from the Doctoral School do not have to take exams in the discipline in which they are preparing their doctoral dissertation before defending their thesis. Education at the Doctoral School is exempt from fees (Article 198(8) PSWiN) and ends with the submission of a doctoral dissertation (Article 204 PSWiN).

### **Extramural Doctorate: An Alternative Path to Obtaining a Doctoral Degree**

Completing a doctoral dissertation in extramural mode is a flexible but requiring great self-discipline form of obtaining a doctoral degree. Candidates choosing this path do not participate in didactic classes as part of the education program, do not prepare the individual research plan and are not obliged to complete professional internship. Under this model, doctoral conduct research independently, often having their place of work or life in a different location than the institution that will award the degree.

Candidates preparing a doctoral thesis on an extramural basis do not receive a doctoral scholarship nor do they have the status of a doctoral candidate, which deprives them of the privileges of candidates studying at Doctoral Schools. Moreover, applying for a doctoral degree in the extramural mode involves paying a fee for the proceedings for the award of a doctoral degree in extramural mode (Article 182(1) of PSWiN). However, its amount cannot exceed the costs of the proceedings, taking into account in particular the costs of the supervisor's salary - 83% of the professor's or assistant supervisor's salary - 50% of the professor's and reviewers' salary - 27% of the professor's salary for each reviewer (Article 184(1-3) of PSWiN).

There are exceptions to the obligation to pay a fee for the procedure for awarding a doctoral degree. In addition to the fact that the fee is not charged to candidates who have completed their training at the Doctoral School run by the entity where they apply for a doctoral degree (Article 182(4) PSWiN), an exception also applies to academic teachers or research workers whose costs of the proceedings are covered by the university employing them, an institute of the Polish Academy of Sciences, research institute or international institute (Article 182(6-7) PSWiN). Moreover, in justified cases, the rector, director of an institute of the Polish Academy of Sciences, director of a research institute or director of an international institute may waive the fee in whole or in part (Article 182(5) PSWiN). Settlement of the above obligations is one of the requirements for applying for a doctoral degree in the extramural mode.



---

The lack of organized extramural education and, therefore, difficulties in verifying learning outcomes at PQF level 8 make it necessary for the university or institution to define detailed rules for verifying this requirement (Article 192(2)(6) of PSWiN) - for example, setting an examination in a discipline. A doctoral candidate applying for a doctoral degree in this mode submits an application for the appointment of a supervisor or supervisors and does so before initiating the commencement of the proceedings (Article 217 PSWiN).

While the external mode allows for greater freedom and time flexibility (no teaching, professional practice or obligation to participate in seminars), candidates applying for a doctoral degree in this mode are subject to the same requirements regarding the above-mentioned procedure, as well as formal and substantive requirements for the doctoral dissertation. This means that a doctoral degree may be awarded to someone who:

- holds a professional title of master's degree, master's degree in engineering or equivalent - except for the exceptions listed in PSWiN (Article 186(1)(1) of PSWiN);
- achieved the learning outcomes at level 8 of the Polish Qualifications Framework (Article 186(1)(2) of PSWiN);
- 1 scientific article published in a scientific journal or in conference proceedings which, in the year of publication of the article in its final form, were included in a list drawn up in accordance with the provisions issued pursuant to Art. 267 sec. 2 point 2 (b), or 1 scientific monograph issued by a publishing house which, in the year of publication of the monograph in its final form, was included on a list drawn up in accordance with the provisions issued pursuant to Art. 267 sec. 2 point 2 (a), or a chapter in such a monograph, or a work of art of considerable importance;
- presented and defended a doctoral dissertation (Article 186(1)(4) of PSWiN);
- met other requirements set by the entity awarding a doctoral degree (Article 186(1)(5) of PSWiN).

In turn, according to PSWiN, the doctoral dissertation:

- should demonstrate the candidate's general theoretical knowledge in the discipline or disciplines and the ability to conduct research or artistic work independently (Article 187(1) of PSWiN);
- its subject is an original solution to a scientific problem or in terms of the application of results of own scientific research in the economic or social sphere, or an original artistic achievement (Article 187(2) of PSWiN);
- may be a written dissertation, including a scientific monograph; a collection of published and thematically related scientific articles; design, construction, technological, implementation or artistic work; as well as an independent and separate part of a collective work (Article 187(3) of PSWiN);
- shall include an abstract in English, whereas a doctoral dissertation prepared in a foreign language – an abstract in Polish. In the case when the dissertation is not in written form, its description in Polish and English shall be attached (Article 187(4) of PSWiN);



- 
- if a doctoral dissertation is not accepted for defense or if it is refused to award the doctoral degree, the same dissertation may not be the basis for reapplying for the award of the doctoral degree of (Article 193(5) of PSWiN).

**To sum up:**

The extramural mode is a completely different way to obtaining a doctoral degree compared to the model of organized doctoral education. It does not cover participation in the Doctoral School, focusing only on the procedure related to awarding a doctoral degree. Due to the lack of a structured educational program and the inability to assess learning progress, the scientific institution or the scientific council of the unit awarding the doctoral degree establishes additional methods for assessing learning progress at PQF level 8. Unlike the training mode at the Doctoral School, in the external mode (except in a few situations) it is necessary to pay a fee for the procedure for awarding a doctoral degree. The amount of this fee is regulated by PSWiN regulations, but may vary depending on the number of supervisors, the presence of an assistant supervisor and the rules adopted by the specific entity awarding the academic degree. Nevertheless, candidates applying for a doctoral degree on an extramural basis and doctoral candidates participating in the Doctoral School must meet the same criteria for obtaining a doctoral degree and the same substantive and formal requirements for a doctoral dissertation.

Despite these differences, both the Doctoral School and the external doctorate pose common challenges for doctoral candidates. Both models require independence, self-discipline and the ability to conduct advanced research. Moreover, obtaining a doctoral degree in both cases requires writing an original, valuable scientific work and defending it before the board.

It is worth remembering that the choice between the Doctoral School and an external doctorate depends on individual preferences, research career goals and the availability of resources. Each of these paths has its advantages and challenges, but ultimately leads to the same goal - obtaining a prestigious doctoral degree and contributing to the development of scientific knowledge.



*AUTOR:*

***Aleksandra Lewandowska, M. Sc.***

***Published:  
8.04.2024***