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2023-2027

EVALUATION REPORT

QUALITY OF EDUCATION AT A DOCTORAL SCHOOL

Szkoła Doktorska Pomorskiego Uniwersytetu Medycznego w
Szczecinie

Pomorski Uniwersytet Medyczny w Szczecinie



Name of the doctoral school

Szkoła Doktorska Pomorskiego Uniwersytetu Medycznego w Szczecinie

Evaluation period

5/29/19–9/22/25

Name of the entity that is responsible for running the doctoral school

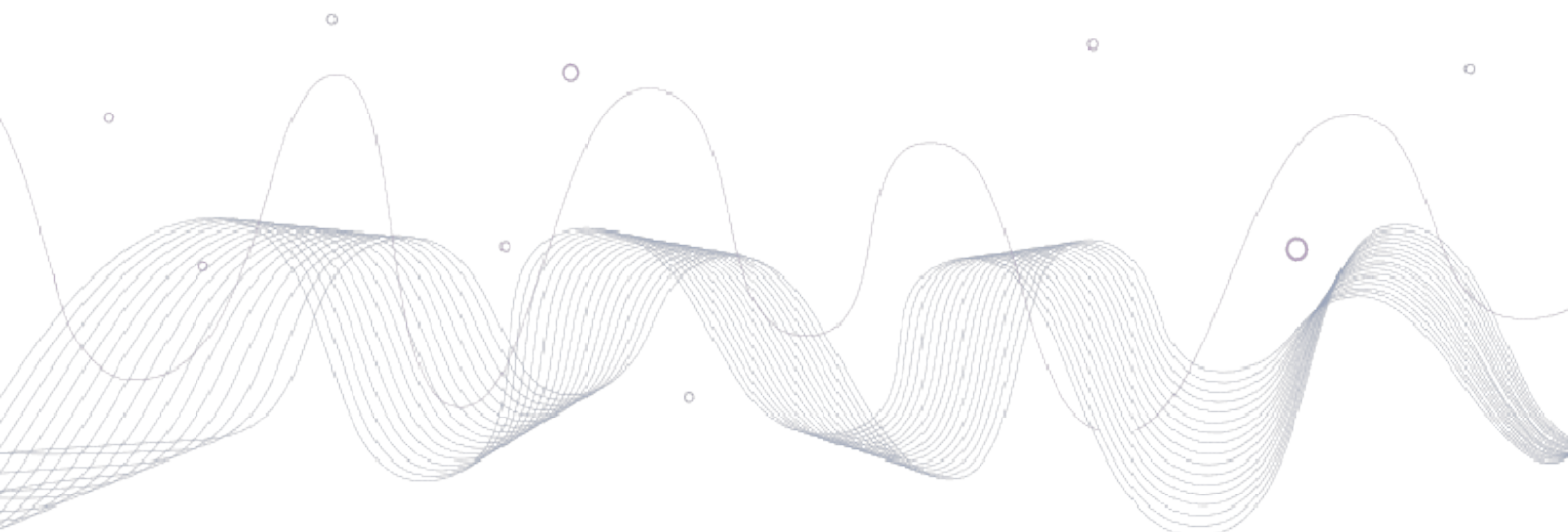
Pomorski Uniwersytet Medyczny w Szczecinie

Entities that jointly run the doctoral school (when conducted jointly)

-

Date of submission of the self-assessment report by the Entity: DD.MM.YYYY

12/11/25



Composition of the evaluation team:

Chairman:

Michał Żmijewski

Secretary:

Aleksandra Królikowska

Team members:

Filip Dąbrowski

Dorota Religa

Joanna Smolarczyk

Developed: 9/1/26

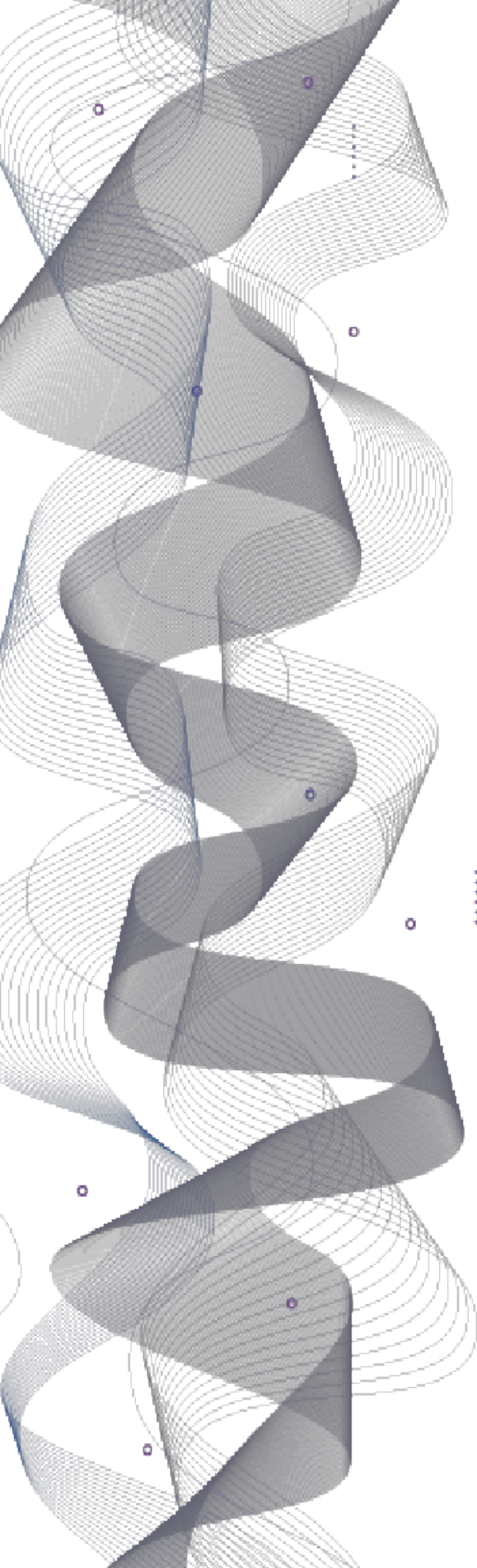


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I. GENERAL INFORMATION ON THE DOCTORAL SCHOOL

Name of doctoral school	Szkoła Doktorska Pomorskiego Uniwersytetu Medycznego w Szczecinie
Date of establishment	2019
Date of commencement of education at doctoral school	10/1/19
Entity cooperating in the conduct of education (this does not refer to entities co-founding a doctoral school)	Pomorski Uniwersytet Medyczny w Szczecinie
Domains of study	Medical and health sciences
Discipline(s) of science or art in which training is provided	pharmacology and pharmacy health sciences medical sciences
Name/scope of the education programme	Curriculum of the Doctoral School of the Pomeranian Medical University – cycle I Curriculum of the Doctoral School of the Pomeranian Medical University – cycle II Curriculum of the Doctoral School of the Pomeranian Medical University – cycle III Curriculum of the Doctoral School of the Pomeranian Medical University – cycle IV Curriculum of the Doctoral School of the Pomeranian Medical University – cycle V Curriculum of the Doctoral School of the Pomeranian Medical University – cycle VI
Number of instructors	11
Number of doctoral students undergoing training at the doctoral school (as of 12/9/25)	107
Number of supervisors in terms of guidance in preparing doctoral dissertations (as of 12/9/25)	68
Number of auxiliary supervisors in terms of guidance in preparing doctoral dissertations (as of 12/9/25)	36

II. INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION AND ITS COURSE

The site visit to the Doctoral School of the Pomeranian Medical University in Szczecin (DS PMU) took place on January 16, 2026, as part of the procedure for evaluating the quality of education at the Doctoral School.

At the outset, it should be noted that appropriate organizational conditions were ensured for the site visit, including the submission of all required documentation by the institution, the provision of suitable facilities and equipment for the experts, and the organization of individual and group meetings with representatives and stakeholders of the institution and the Doctoral School, including the agreement on the visit schedule.

During the site visit, in addition to the Chair, Prof. Michał Żmijewski, the following members were present: Aleksandra Królikowska, PhD, DSc, Assoc. Prof. (Secretary), Dorota Religa, PhD, and Joanna Smolarczyk, MD, PhD. Filip A. Dąbrowski, MD, PhD, DSc, Assoc. Prof., did not participate in the visit due to circumstances beyond his control (flight from Warsaw to Szczecin cancelled due to adverse weather conditions). In view of his substantive contribution to the evaluation process, it was agreed with the Ministry of Science and Higher Education that he would remain a member of the Evaluation Team.

09:00–09:30 – Meeting of the Evaluation Team for the assessment of the quality of education at DS PMU (hereinafter referred to as the Team) with the authorities of PMU and the management of DS PMU. During this meeting, the Chair of the Team presented the composition of the Team and discussed the objectives of the visit and the schedule of meetings.

The meeting had an organizational and informational character and was attended by a broad representation of the authorities of PMU and DS PMU. Participants included, among others:

- Vice-Rector for Education (on behalf of the Rector);
- Director of DS PMU;
- Deans of relevant faculties;
- Head of the Interfaculty Centre for Education in English.

In addition, the meeting was attended by: the Deputy Bursar, the Chair of the University Quality Assurance Team, the Director of the Medical Simulation Centre, the Chair of the Bioethics Committee, as well as members of the DS Council, academic teachers involved in DS PMU, and supervisors.

Following the introduction of participants, the Director of DS PMU presented the organizational structure of the DS (direct subordination to the Rector; Director, Doctoral School Council, DS Office), the range of disciplines in which education is provided, and the key principles of the educational process, recruitment rules, support for doctoral candidates, and quality assurance mechanisms. The following aspects were presented in detail:

- the current number and profile of doctoral candidates;
- the objectives of education and its completion;
- the curriculum and assurance of learning outcomes at Level 8 PRK;
- principles for the development and verification of Individual Research Plans (IRP);
- methods and principles for verifying learning outcomes;
- qualifications and scientific potential of staff involved in doctoral education;
- recruitment procedures (competitive process, analysis of recruitment data from 2019–2025);

- supervisory support and its monitoring (including survey results);
- access of doctoral candidates to research, library, and IT infrastructure (e.g., Clinical Research Support Centre, Technology Transfer Centre, Examination Centre, laboratory units);
- support systems for doctoral candidates (e.g., Ombudsperson, Office for Persons with Disabilities, anti-mobbing committees, psychological support);
- internationalization of education (mobility, grants, projects, courses in English);
- principles of mid-term evaluation;
- outcomes of education (publications, grants, internships, defences);
- financial aspects of DS PMU and doctoral candidates' activities;
- changes introduced in the functioning of the DS over time.

During the meeting, the issue of representation of the three scientific disciplines within DS PMU was discussed, particularly in the context of recruitment and the structure of doctoral candidates. Representatives indicated that recruitment limits had been considered but were not introduced due to a balanced distribution of candidates. In the third discipline – pharmaceutical sciences – recruitment was opened in 2023, as only then was the right to confer doctoral degrees in this discipline obtained.

The required qualifications and responsibilities of supervisors were also discussed, including their role in supporting the implementation of IRPs. It was emphasized that, according to survey results, over 87% of doctoral candidates rated the supervisor's engagement and support in the implementation of the IRP very highly.

It was also noted that cases of changing supervisors have been rare and resulted mainly from unforeseen, health-related, or other justified circumstances.

Subsequently, activities related to internationalization were discussed, focusing on the activity of DS PMU staff, their participation in international projects and mobility programmes. DS PMU is considering broader openness to international candidates and teaching in English. Attention was drawn to solutions supporting doctoral candidate mobility, including individualized study paths, research conducted within IRPs in cooperation with foreign partners, and international internships. Additionally, a series of "Meetings with Science" involving international researchers is organized.

The profile of doctoral candidates was also presented, indicating that the majority are professionally active (e.g., physicians, biotechnologists, medical analysts). It was also emphasized that some DS PMU graduates remain at the University as academic staff. The effectiveness of doctoral education was also discussed.

Modifications introduced in subsequent years of the Doctoral School's operation were presented, including changes to regulations and internal documents, updates to the curriculum, modifications to the recruitment process, and adjustments to mid-term evaluation procedures. Opportunities for funding doctoral candidates' scientific activities were also presented. It was indicated that doctoral candidates may apply for funding through external and internal grant competitions.

The University authorities emphasized their strong commitment to doctoral candidates, including maintaining direct contact with them and involving them in the development of strategic documents, in particular the University Strategy. The role of DS PMU as an important element of the University's development and staff-building potential was highlighted. Support provided to researchers was also emphasized, including assistance in research processes and in obtaining and managing grants. It was noted that the University identifies key development "niches" and recognizes the need to educate doctoral candidates to address current needs and challenges.

09:30–10:00 – Meeting of the Team with the management of DS PMU

10:00–11:30 – Combined meeting with teaching staff, supervisors, representatives of Scientific Councils of disciplines represented in DS PMU, and the University Quality Assurance Team (UQAS).

For practical reasons, the above meetings were combined into one. The meeting had a working and in-depth character and focused on detailed issues related to the quality assurance system in DS PMU, its documentation, and mechanisms for monitoring and improving the educational process.

11:30–12:00 – Visit to research and teaching infrastructure: Medical Simulation Centre and Interfaculty Teaching Centre

12:00–13:00 – Meeting with doctoral candidates and the Doctoral Students' Council

13:00–13:45 – Meeting with the DS PMU administration and the team preparing the self-evaluation report, including discussion of its elements. The Evaluation Team reviewed: IRPs, curricula, mid-term evaluation documentation, surveys, recruitment results, and criteria for selecting supervisors and academic teachers.

The functioning of the DS administration and elements of the self-evaluation report were discussed. Documentation analysis included:

- IRPs;
- curricula and syllabi;
- class observation reports;
- mid-term evaluation documentation;
- results of academic staff evaluations;
- recruitment results.

13:45–14:30 – Internal meeting of the Evaluation Team

14:30–15:00 – Final meeting with the management of DS PMU – summary of the visit and presentation of the next stages of the evaluation procedure

The summary of the visit was presented and further steps in the evaluation process were discussed.

15:00 – End of the site visit.

III. COLLABORATION BETWEEN THE ENTITY AND THE DOCTORAL STUDENT SELF-GOVERNMENT

The Doctoral School of the Pomeranian Medical University in Szczecin (DS PMU) maintains continuous and constructive cooperation with the Doctoral Students' Parliament of PMU – the body representing the doctoral student community of the University. This cooperation is based on dialogue, partnership, and a shared commitment to ensuring high-quality education and the scientific development of doctoral candidates.

During the meeting with representatives of the Doctoral Students' Parliament, doctoral candidates emphasized that they appreciate the involvement of the Director of the DS in the development of DS PMU. They also confirmed that they have a satisfactory level of participation in the work of the governing bodies of PMU. Among others, a representative of the Doctoral Students' Parliament serves on the DS PMU Council and actively participates in its work. The Doctoral Students' Parliament of PMU provides opinions on the DS PMU Regulations and study programmes, ensuring that they are aligned with the needs of doctoral candidates.

Doctoral student representatives also serve on scholarship committees and participate in admission interviews with candidates to DS PMU, which ensures transparency of recruitment and scholarship processes. Doctoral candidates also take part in meetings of Scientific Councils (as observers) and represent the doctoral student community in the Senate. They highlighted regular communication and consultations with the authorities of DS PMU (including meetings during which issues related to study conditions, scientific support, and other needs of doctoral candidates are discussed).

Among the areas requiring improvement that have not yet been resolved, doctoral candidates indicated: difficulties in accessing accommodation in student dormitories for DS doctoral candidates, lack of access to PMU's virtual infrastructure (including the Virtual Dean's Office and the electronic procurement system – these systems exist and operate at PMU but are not accessible to doctoral candidates), administrative issues related to requesting research reagents, and problems with the settlement of business trips.

The evaluation team recommends paying particular attention to the areas identified above and maintaining close cooperation between the Director of DS PMU and the Doctoral Students' Parliament.

IV. INFORMATION ON THE DOCTORAL SCHOOL TO WHICH THE STATUTORY CRITERIA APPLY

- **The adequacy of the education programmes and individual research plans with respect to the learning outcomes for qualifications at level 8 of the PQF and their implementation:**

Teaching and research activities at DS PMU are conducted in full compliance with applicable legal regulations and the learning outcomes framework for Level 8 of the Polish Qualifications Framework (PRK), in accordance with the Regulation of the Minister of Science and Higher Education.

The curriculum is aligned with the University's mission and is oriented towards the development of research, teaching, organizational, and social competencies, as well as independence in planning and conducting research, analyzing and disseminating results, obtaining research funding, and fostering ethical attitudes and social responsibility, in line with the learning outcomes defined for Level 8 PRK.

The programme also considers the interdisciplinary nature of research and the development of transferable skills, such as critical thinking, scientific communication, teamwork, and research ethics. The curriculum is regularly reviewed, and necessary modifications and improvements are introduced when required.

Education is provided in three disciplines. The curriculum is common to all doctoral candidates, while individualization is ensured through elective courses and, above all, through the implementation of the Individual Research Plan (IRP). The IRP is developed by the doctoral candidate in cooperation with the supervisor and is subject to formal verification to ensure compliance with Level 8 PRK requirements.

The assessment of the adequacy of both the curriculum and the IRP in relation to the learning outcomes for Level 8 PRK is positive; however, further clarification of their relationship would be advisable.

In accordance with applicable regulations, education at DS PMU is based on both the curriculum and the implementation of the IRP. A significant share of supervisor-led seminars is evident within the curriculum. This solution was clearly intended to support the early structuring of doctoral research and the monitoring of progress, which should be assessed positively. At the same time, the analysis of the submitted materials and the findings of the site visit indicate that it is justified to further clarify the links between the curriculum and the IRP, particularly regarding supervisor-led seminars.

Supervisor-led seminars are an important component of the curriculum, accounting for a substantial portion of teaching hours; however, their implementation has not been fully structured. In particular, learning outcomes have not been assigned to these courses, their content has not been defined in the form of syllabi, and clear rules for verifying learning outcomes have not been established. The assessment of seminars is descriptive and carried out by the supervisor, which may lead to variability in requirements and assessment methods among doctoral candidates. Consequently, this makes it more difficult to ensure the coherence of the educational process and the systematic monitoring of learning outcomes at the DS PMU level.

Furthermore, it would be advisable to consider introducing a learning outcomes mapping matrix, which would allow for clear assignment of outcomes to specific courses within the curriculum, including supervisor-led seminars, and would improve their monitoring and verification.

The evaluation team would also like to draw attention to the need for continued monitoring of the quality and adequacy of doctoral dissertation topics, particularly regarding their feasibility and the availability of appropriate conditions for their implementation.

Doctoral candidates appreciated the basic methodology courses but noted they focus partly

on medical training, referencing the OSCE exam, which may not suit other disciplines. They highlighted the need to clarify their role in teaching activities. Discussions on elective courses covered their proposal principles and selection, suggesting potential improvements.

- **The method of assessing the learning outcomes for qualifications at level 8 of the PQF:**

The system for verifying learning outcomes at DS PMU meets the requirements for qualifications at Level 8 of the Polish Qualifications Framework (PRK) and is consistent with applicable standards of educational quality. The principles for verifying learning outcomes are defined in the University's internal regulations, particularly in the DS Regulations, the curriculum, and the documents of the University Quality Assurance System (UQAS). These documents are publicly available, which supports the transparency of the process.

Methods and forms of verifying learning outcomes are assigned to individual courses in the curriculum and syllabi and include, among others, examinations, graded and ungraded course completions, presentations, written assignments, and research projects. Course instructors are required to inform doctoral candidates of the learning outcomes, assessment methods, and evaluation criteria prior to the start of classes. The verification process is multi-stage, and its transparency and reliability are ensured, among others, by a uniform grading system, documentation of doctoral candidates' achievements, and alignment of assessment methods with the intended learning outcomes.

The verification of learning outcomes is supported by system-level solutions within UQAS, including monitoring of educational quality, programme analysis, collection of doctoral candidates' feedback, and formulation of improvement measures. This process involves course instructors, supervisors, and the Director of DS PMU.

However, the analysis of the submitted materials indicates that, in some syllabi, the provisions regarding methods for verifying learning outcomes and assessment criteria are overly general. In this context, it would be advisable to provide more detailed descriptions or to clearly indicate where detailed assessment rules are available. The evaluation team also notes the need to further specify the principles for verifying learning outcomes for forms such as presentations, including consideration of standardized assessment sheets and clearly defined evaluation criteria.

Based on discussions with representatives of DS PMU and UQAS, it was also established that class observations within the DS PMU are neither regular nor systematic. It was indicated that no class observations were conducted in the previous academic year or in the current one. In fact, only one class observation has been carried out throughout the entire period of the Doctoral School's operation.

Therefore, it is advisable to consider establishing a quality assurance committee dedicated to the DS, which would support the DS PMU authorities in the systematic monitoring of educational quality, in particular by planning and conducting class observations, analyzing their results, and formulating improvement recommendations. This body could also serve a coordinating role in the evaluation of learning outcomes, the review of syllabi, and the implementation of quality enhancement measures.

Based on the meetings conducted, the evaluation team also draws attention to the selected issues raised by doctoral candidates. These included, among others, partial repetition of course content from courses previously completed during master's studies (e.g., in biotechnology), which may affect the perceived adequacy of some courses.

With regard to the system for assessing scientific achievements, attention was drawn to the scoring method, in which original research articles and narrative reviews are treated similarly. In the opinion of doctoral candidates, this does not always reflect differences in workload and intellectual contribution. It should also be noted that the draft regulation concerning the increased doctoral scholarship was developed in cooperation with the Doctoral Students' Parliament. The increased doctoral scholarship is awarded to doctoral candidates who rank

within the top 20% of students in each year of the PhD programme. The evaluation takes into account, among other achievements, publications worth more than 100 ministerial points, thereby rewarding publications of high scientific quality. The system also differentiates the doctoral candidate's contribution by assigning different scores to achievements obtained as a first author and as a co-author. It may therefore be concluded that the proposed system is quality-oriented. At the same time, this does not mean that it cannot be further improved in consultation with doctoral candidates.

In the context of the merit-based scholarship, it was noted that quantitative criteria (number of publications) play a dominant role, with relatively less consideration given to their quality and to other forms of activity, including organizational involvement.

- **Qualification of academic teachers and academic staff employed at the doctoral school:**
DS PMU provides doctoral education based on a team of academic staff with very high scientific, teaching, and organizational competencies. The structure of the staff and the adopted mechanisms for evaluating their achievements and qualifications ensure compliance with the requirements set out in the applicable legislation.

The academic staff of DS PMU comprises distinguished researchers in medical sciences, pharmaceutical sciences, and health sciences. Teaching is delivered by professors and habilitated doctors with significant scientific achievements and professional experience, which supports the effective scientific development of doctoral candidates. Academic staff are actively involved in the implementation of national and international research, implementation, and expert projects. They serve on the editorial boards of scientific journals, review panels, and scientific committees, and co-organize scientific and educational conferences. The high level of staff expertise is also confirmed by their presence on the boards of reputable national scientific societies.

The scientific output of the DS PMU staff is of high quality and is closely aligned with the disciplines in which education is provided. Key members of the staff include professors and habilitated doctors who serve as heads of scientific units and actively participate in national and international research initiatives. The scientific and teaching activity of the staff involved in education at the DS is fully consistent with the learning outcomes assigned to Level 8 PRK, including advanced, specialized knowledge and competencies in the independent design and conduct of scientific research.

High bibliometric indicators, participation in international research consortia, leadership of research teams, and expert activities confirm the significant research potential of the staff, ensuring compliance with all standards appropriate for this stage of education. Particular distinction is held by those with numerous publications in high-impact journals and with high ministerial scoring.

The experience of DS PMU staff in supporting the scientific development of early-career researchers is evident. Their activities also include a wide range of teaching and organizational initiatives, demonstrating their commitment to developing future academic staff. These include, among others, directing postgraduate programmes, delivering specialized courses, conducting research methodology workshops, and mentoring doctoral candidates. DS PMU ensures an appropriate system for verifying the qualifications and engagement of teaching staff in accordance with internal procedures. The competencies of academic teachers are assessed through periodic staff evaluations. At the same time, the evaluation team appreciates the open attitude of supervisors and their individual approach to the development of doctoral candidates.

From a developmental perspective, it is advisable to further strengthen and internationalize the staff by increasing the involvement of visiting lecturers and researchers from foreign academic institutions, as well as expanding opportunities for doctoral candidates to participate in international mobility and research placements. The experts' recommendations also include measures to facilitate the alignment of supervisors with research pathways based on an analysis of their research areas, further development of systems for documenting and recognizing supervisors' international activities in periodic evaluations, and strengthening the internationalization of the educational process through the development of partnership and scholarship programmes in which supervisors would be given priority participation.

The evaluation team concludes that the qualifications of the staff at DS PMU and the procedures applied ensure a very high quality of doctoral education.

- **The quality of the admission process:**

DS PMU ensures full accessibility to legal acts and information about its operations by systematically publishing documents on the DS PMU website and in the PMU Public Information Bulletin (BIP). Documents are published promptly, and their currency, completeness, and substantive consistency are verified by the DS PMU Office staff. The website serves as the primary information channel, enabling users to access documents and current announcements efficiently. Its effectiveness is confirmed by direct users.

The recruitment process for DS PMU is conducted in accordance with a Senate resolution. It takes the form of an open competition in the fields of medical and health sciences, within the disciplines of medical sciences, health sciences, and pharmaceutical sciences. Information on the rules and procedures for recruitment is disseminated via the "Recruitment" section of the DS PMU website, the BIP PMU, and through the University's social media and promotional meetings for students. All recruitment documents are made publicly available well in advance. The composition of recruitment committees is determined by the substantive alignment of candidates' proposed research topics.

The recruitment rules comply with applicable regulations. Candidates must document proficiency in a foreign language at a minimum B2 level, and foreign candidates must also demonstrate knowledge of Polish. Since 2025, electronic registration has been implemented in the recruitment process, significantly improving its efficiency. Candidates formally admitted to the recruitment process undergo two stages: evaluation of the research project and an interview. Candidates independently present their project and respond to comments from the reviewer and the Committee. They are assessed on their general knowledge in the field and discipline, level of preparation to implement the research project, ability to present it, conduct discussion, and formulate opinions, as well as the feasibility and financial viability of the proposed research. Each member of the Committee provides an independent assessment using a confidential scoring sheet. Admissions are conducted within the limit of places determined by the Rector.

The evaluation team suggests keeping a separate process for candidates studying in externally funded projects. These candidates can be admitted outside the limit with the Rector's approval, without appearing on the ranking list, if they meet qualification criteria and their scholarship is project-funded.

From the perspective of cost-effectiveness and the ability to secure external funding for valuable research projects, the University should increase external stakeholders' engagement in financing such projects.

The experts also noted the need to evaluate research topics proposed by supervisors in terms of their scientific value, feasibility, and the availability of resources necessary for their implementation.

The recruitment process includes effective appeal procedures to ensure transparency and fairness. Since 2020, DS PMU has also conducted an evaluation of the recruitment process using surveys. The results confirm a high level of transparency and organization. Candidates rated the clarity of the website and the availability of information very highly, with as many as 98.72% considering the recruitment rules to be clear. The survey findings have enabled the identification of areas requiring improvement and have become a basis for refining procedures, supporting transparency, efficiency, and alignment of the recruitment process with candidates' needs.

In conclusion, DS PMU conducts its recruitment process in a manner consistent with contemporary academic standards, focused on quality, equal opportunities, and the

development of candidates' research potential. The DS continuously adapts its procedures to the evolving scientific landscape, increasing the number of fully digital processes, regularly evaluating its activities, and introducing appropriate improvements.

- **The quality of scientific or artistic guidance, and support in research:**

In accordance with the DS PMU Regulations, the supervisor provides the doctoral candidate with substantive academic guidance, regular consultations on ongoing work, supervision of the preparation and implementation of the Individual Research Plan (IRP), progress monitoring, and support in preparing publications and the doctoral dissertation.

The process of appointing supervisors at DS PMU is based on the principles set out in the Regulations: the supervisor and assistant supervisor are appointed by decision of the Director of DS PMU within 3 months of the commencement of education. A supervisor must be employed at PMU and hold at least a habilitated doctor degree, while an assistant supervisor must hold at least a doctoral degree. This standard ensures highly competent supervisors, confirmed by survey results from doctoral candidates evaluating their supervisors. Supervisors are evaluated by outcomes with doctoral candidates and the annual "Supervisor Evaluation" survey, which is non-anonymous, allowing the DS Director to review cases and act.

Experience to date indicates that doctoral candidates do not hesitate to express critical opinions in the surveys. During meetings with doctoral candidates, no objections were raised regarding the current supervisor evaluation system. They also demonstrated full awareness of the challenges associated with implementing anonymous evaluation of supervisory support, as well as the benefits of the current non-anonymous system. Doctoral candidates indicated that they are aware of available anonymous channels for reporting difficult or conflict situations. Survey data also confirm that doctoral candidates are aware of the available forms of support. Mechanisms for resolving difficulties are clear. At PMU, the following bodies operate: the Ombudsperson for Students and Doctoral Candidates and the Committee for the Prevention of Mobbing and Discrimination. Potential conflict situations are rare. In the survey, 1.29% of doctoral candidates reported issues related to respect, and 3.85% reported problems in cooperation. The survey data confirm the effectiveness of the existing procedures, good communication, and the readiness of the DS PMU authorities to address problems at an early stage.

The majority of evaluations of supervisory support during the assessment period are positive. In particular, the availability of supervisors, the quality of consultations, substantive support, assistance with publishing, and support in familiarizing doctoral candidates with the infrastructure were rated very highly. Isolated lower ratings are incidental and will be analyzed in detail by the DS PMU authorities. The system, based on non-anonymous surveys, analysis of their results, and actions undertaken by the Director of DS PMU, ensures effective quality control and supports the continuous improvement of supervisory practices. Following meetings with doctoral candidates, the evaluation team suggests evaluating supervisory support also by DS graduates during the period between dissertation submission and defense, or after the defense.

Doctoral candidates have access to research infrastructure, laboratories, equipment, specialized software, and PMU's library resources. Survey data confirm the high quality of this provision: 80.76% rated their introduction to the infrastructure as "very good," and 16.66% as "good." During meetings with the evaluation team, doctoral candidates noted a lack of access to the University's virtual infrastructure (such as the Virtual Dean's Office and electronic systems for submitting requests and travel applications) that is available at PMU but currently unavailable to them. The evaluation team recommends integrating doctoral candidates into the existing virtual systems, which may help streamline administrative processes and increase the efficiency of both doctoral candidate-supervisor collaboration and cooperation with PMU's administrative units.

- **The reliability of the midterm evaluation:**

The mid-term evaluation is conducted in accordance with the procedure specified in PMU Rector's Ordinance No. 29/2023. It includes an assessment of the substantive and timely implementation of the Individual Research Plan (IRP), the doctoral candidate's report, and three reviews prepared by committee members, including an external reviewer. Meetings are held remotely, and the result is communicated to the doctoral candidate, along with access to the documentation. The procedure ensures transparency, impartiality, and consistent assessments. To date, all committee meetings (83 in total) have resulted in positive evaluations, though with differentiated scoring.

The reliability of the mid-term evaluation is a key element of the quality of education in doctoral schools and should genuinely verify the progress of doctoral candidates. In practice, however, the vast majority of doctoral candidates (in fact, nearly all) successfully pass the mid-term evaluation, yet not all complete the programme and obtain a doctoral degree. This is clearly visible in the case of DS PMU: out of 108 doctoral candidates, only 17 have completed the programme. It should, of course, be taken into account that the Doctoral School has only been in operation for six years; however, among the first two cohorts (2019/20 and 2020/21), only slightly more than half completed the programme (8/15 and 8/15, respectively). It is also important to note that the COVID-19 pandemic may have delayed the implementation of research projects. Additionally, as of the date of the evaluation, only six individuals had been removed from the list of doctoral students, including five before the mid-term evaluation. The remaining doctoral students are at various stages of progress in preparing their doctoral dissertations. It should also be noted that doctoral candidates have a statutory right to extend the deadline for submitting their doctoral dissertation and to suspend their education in cases provided for by law. Most doctoral students make use of these possibilities during the four-year period of doctoral training.

On the other hand, this indicates that mid-term evaluations may not identify problems early enough, which later result in failure to submit the doctoral dissertation or to achieve the intended research outcomes during the four-year period of doctoral training. One possible reason may be an excessive focus on the formal fulfillment of indicators, with insufficient attention given to qualitative aspects of research and realistic planning.

The analysis of progress and identification of barriers should be more in-depth and not based solely on declarations and good intentions, particularly in cases where there are no preliminary results, weak recruitment of the research group, or a lack of publications or even a manuscript. To increase the reliability of the evaluation, it would be advisable to consider introducing a more public character to the process, for example, as a research seminar involving a broader committee. Such a seminar could include the presentation of results, methodological discussion, and an assessment of the coherence of the research plan for subsequent years. Another option would be to introduce a two-stage evaluation, in which an independent reviewer or external expert verifies the material presented by the doctoral candidate. Such a model would increase objectivity and reduce situations in which supervisors assess the progress of their doctoral candidates too leniently. At the same time, the high quality of supervisory support observed at PMU demonstrates that systems based on regular verification and surveys can function effectively, provided they are conducted reliably and enable genuine improvement.

- **Internationalisation:**

One of the key areas in the evaluation of a doctoral school is internationalization, including, among others, the number of international research projects, joint publications, and the mobility of doctoral candidates and staff. In the case of DS PMU, it is evident that supervisors who have participated in mobility programmes such as NAWA make use of their contacts with other universities to develop more advanced scientific cooperation. However, this potential could be utilized to a greater extent. One possible measure to strengthen internationalization would be the introduction of regular joint online seminars conducted with foreign institutions, which would enhance knowledge exchange.

Another important aspect is the possibility of implementing doctoral education in the cotutelle model, which significantly increases the level of internationalization and integrates doctoral programmes across two countries. Cotutelle enables dual supervision and the awarding of a joint or double degree. It would also be worth considering introducing dual affiliation options for doctoral candidates, which would increase their visibility in international databases and facilitate co-authorship in research projects. The evaluation team noted that the mobility presented primarily concerned staff (ERASMUS+, NAWA), which led to questions regarding the mobility of doctoral candidates.

Internationalization is also strengthened through participation in EU-funded projects, joint grants, and the presence of international students and researchers at the University. According to the reports, it is not only the existence of international partnerships that is important, but also actual activity, including publications, mobility, and participation in seminars, which in Szczecin could be further developed.

The evaluation team also points to the insufficient number of courses delivered in English. Currently, the number of courses offered in English is limited (essentially to statistics courses), which significantly hinders the internationalization of DS PMU and limits the ability to recruit international doctoral candidates. Increasing the number of courses taught in English—both lectures, seminars, and practical classes—could enhance the attractiveness of the programme and enable gradual opening to the international academic community. It would be advisable to consider the gradual introduction of bilingual delivery in key programme modules.

Another area that could be strengthened is the participation of doctoral candidates from outside Poland, which is currently low and limits academic diversity and international exchange of experience. One of the main barriers is the requirement to demonstrate proficiency in the Polish language at the beginning of education in the DS. It would be worth analysing the possibility of gradually modifying these requirements or introducing fully English-language tracks. An alternative or transitional solution could be to deliver some courses in English in cooperation with other Polish doctoral schools, including those in Szczecin, where a higher number of international doctoral candidates are enrolled.

Such measures could gradually increase the participation of international doctoral candidates, improve the quality of education, and strengthen the position of DS PMU in the international academic environment.

- **The effectiveness of the doctoral education:**

The evaluation team noted the need for more frequent monitoring of this process due to the significant number of doctoral candidates who do not submit their dissertations on time.

With regard to extensions of the period of study, the Director of DS PMU indicated that, in the case of the first cohorts, doctoral candidates successfully passed the mid-term evaluation; however, the further course of their education was significantly affected by restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic. It was also noted that there is a lack of clear, objective criteria for granting extensions.

Statistical data indicate that only 75% of all doctoral candidates who completed education at DS PMU submitted an application to initiate proceedings for the award of the doctoral degree, and only 60% ultimately obtained the degree. During the evaluated period, six doctoral candidates suspended their education at the DS. It may be noted as a positive aspect that no graduate of DS PMU has been refused the award of a doctoral degree. Nevertheless, the process of evaluating doctoral candidates' progress, starting from the mid-term evaluation, requires careful review and corrective measures.

The analysis of survey data indicates that the majority of doctoral candidates extended the deadline for submitting their dissertations by two years due to research-related difficulties during the pandemic and publication delays. However, it should be noted that nearly four years have passed since the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is also worth noting that DS PMU monitors the career paths of its graduates. A total of 41 graduates are employed at PMU, including 26 academic teachers, 14 technical staff members, and one administrative employee. Approximately 50% of graduates continue their careers in academia, and two individuals serve as assistant supervisors.

In conclusion, the proportion of initiated proceedings and completed doctoral defences could be higher, particularly given that no refusals to award the doctoral degree have been recorded. On the other hand, the results of evaluation surveys confirm very high ratings of both the academic staff and the University administration, which indicates the need to develop a more effective system for monitoring progress in the preparation of doctoral dissertations—one that places greater emphasis on objective external assessment rather than on often overly optimistic evaluations by supervisors. The employment of DS PMU graduates at PMU indicates the creation of optimal conditions for education and work and constitutes a positive perspective for the University's future development.

V. FINAL OPINION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The site visit to the Doctoral School of the Pomeranian Medical University in Szczecin (DS PMU) was conducted on January 16, 2026, as part of the quality assessment procedure of doctoral education.

It should be emphasized that appropriate organizational conditions were established for the site visit, including the provision of all necessary documentation, access to suitable facilities and equipment for the experts, and the organization of individual and group meetings with representatives and stakeholders of the institution and the DS. The visit was conducted in accordance with the previously prepared schedule.

During the visit, the evaluation team met with the PMU authorities, the team responsible for the self-evaluation report, the DS PMU administration, teaching staff and PhD supervisors, as well as doctoral candidates. The team also reviewed documentation related to individual research plans and midterm evaluations. These meetings were marked by substantive discussion, openness among participants, and an organizational culture conducive to constructive dialogue.

The evaluation team emphasized the high quality of the self-evaluation report and the coherence of the DS PMU's activities with the requirements assigned to Level 8 of the Polish Qualifications Framework (PRK). The analysis of documents and discussions with staff and doctoral candidates confirmed that the implemented curriculum supports the acquisition of advanced knowledge as well as research and social competencies.

During the visit, the recruitment and qualification processes, the scope of responsibilities for PhD supervisors, mid-term evaluation procedures, the effectiveness of education, course syllabi, and class observations were also discussed.

In summary, the evaluation team clearly emphasized:

- the high level of competence and commitment of the management staff and PhD supervisors;
- transparency and well-organized administrative processes, recruitment, and mid-term evaluation procedures;
- high quality of teaching programs and their compliance with Level 8 PRK requirements;
- the engagement of the Director of the DC in the development of DS PMU and cooperation with the Doctoral Students' Parliament;
- the implementation of a recruitment process aligned with modern academic standards, focused on quality, equal opportunities, and the development of candidates' research potential;
- a well-developed and structured survey system enabling evaluation of all processes and stakeholders involved in the functioning of the Doctoral School (including recruitment, mid-term evaluation, teaching, and administration);
- a high percentage of positive feedback obtained from anonymous doctoral student surveys;
- the use of annual non-anonymous supervisor evaluations to resolve potential conflicts (it is worth noting that such conflicts were very rare, which indicates very good cooperation between doctoral candidates and supervisors);
- monitoring of graduates' career paths and a relatively high proportion of graduates employed at PMU.

The evaluation team also identified several recommendations for further development:

- increasing the availability of accommodation in student dormitories for DS PMU candidates;
- integrating the DS PMU and its doctoral candidates into the PMU's virtual infrastructure;

- developing a syllabus for supervisor-led seminars, defining learning outcomes, and standardizing and formalizing the assessment method for this course;
- introducing a learning outcomes mapping matrix to clearly assign outcomes to specific courses within the curriculum;
- further adapting the curriculum to the needs and competencies of doctoral candidates;
- implementing a system of class observations and considering the establishment of a quality assurance committee dedicated to the DS PMU;
- increasing the role of qualitative criteria in doctoral candidate evaluation, particularly in the context of merit-based scholarships (currently dominated by quantitative metrics such as the number of publications, regardless of their type);
- increasing the internationalization of the DS PMU by expanding the offer of courses in English and recruiting international candidates;
- introducing evaluation of research topics proposed by PhD supervisors in terms of scientific value, feasibility, and available funding;
- improving monitoring of doctoral candidates' progress during their doctoral projects (the very low percentage of timely completions indicates the need for more frequent evaluations, preferably conducted by independent experts);
- increasing doctoral candidates' participation in international collaboration and mobility, including consideration of cotutelle doctoral programs.

In conclusion, the evaluation team determined that the DS PMU is a modern, efficient, and well-managed unit that offers doctoral candidates a high-quality environment for education and scientific development. Continuous improvement of the educational process and the implementation of high-quality solutions aligned with European academic standards should be emphasized.

The evaluation team recommends that the next assessment of the Doctoral School of the Pomeranian Medical University in Szczecin be conducted in six years, in accordance with Article 259(2) of the Act of July 20, 2018, "Law on Higher Education and Science" (Journal of Laws 2024, item 1571, as amended).

VI. ASSESSMENT AND REASON

Final assessment
positive

Reason:

The analysis of the self-evaluation report submitted by the Doctoral School of the Pomeranian Medical University in Szczecin (SD PUM), together with the verification of the information obtained during the site visit conducted at the evaluated institution, leads the KEN Evaluation Team to issue a positive recommendation.

The Evaluation Team assessed the SD PUM report very highly, and the procedures and achievements presented by the School may serve as an example for other doctoral schools in Poland.

We recommend that the next evaluation of the Doctoral School of the Pomeranian Medical University in Szczecin be conducted in six years, in accordance with Article 259(2) of the Act of 20 July 2018 – Law on Higher Education and Science (Journal of Laws of 2024, item 1571, as amended).

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