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2023-2027

# DOCTORAL SCHOOL

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## EDUCATION QUALITY REPORT

Interdyscyplinarna Szkoła Doktorska

Uniwersytet Bielsko-Bialski

**Name and seat of the doctoral school**

Interdyscyplinarna Szkoła Doktorska

**Evaluation period**

10/1/19–5/11/25

**Name and seat of the entity that is responsible for running the doctoral school**

Uniwersytet Bielsko-Bialski

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

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**Date of report**

7/23/25

Composition of the evaluation team:

**Chairman:**

Wojciech Guz

**Secretary:**

Katarzyna Krot

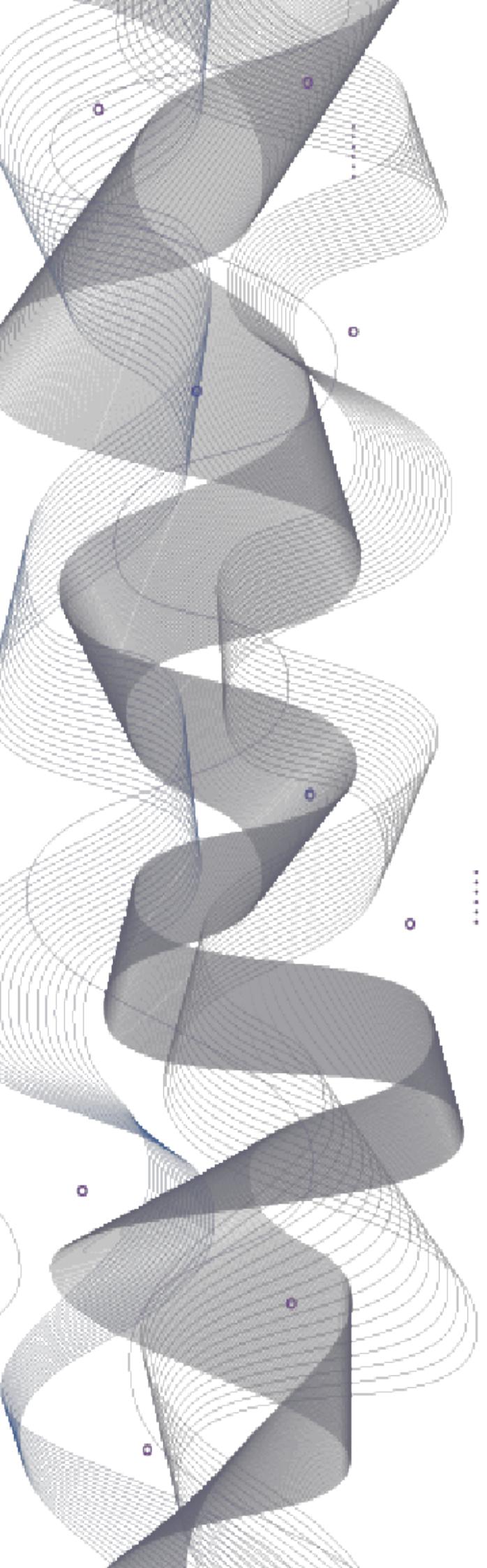
**Team members:**

Monika Jakubus

Hubert Gojzewski

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# I. GENERAL INFORMATION ON THE DOCTORAL SCHOOL

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Name of doctoral school	Interdyscyplinarna Szkoła Doktorska
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)	Uniwersytet Bielsko-Bialski
Domains of study	Humanities (from: 01-01-2018) Engineering and technology (from: 01-01-2018) Medical and health sciences (from: 01-01-2018) Social sciences (from: 01-01-2018)
Discipline(s) of science or art in which training is provided	linguistics (from: 01-01-2018) literary studies (from: 01-01-2018) information and communication technology (from: 01-01-2018) materials engineering (from: 01-01-2018) mechanical engineering (from: 01-01-2018) environmental engineering, mining and energy (from: 01-01-2018) civil engineering, geodesy and transport (from: 11-11-2022) health sciences (from: 01-01-2018) management and quality studies (from: 01-01-2018) educational sciences (from: 01-01-2018)
Name/scope of the education programme	ISD - literary studies ISD - mechanical engineering ISD - materials engineering ISD - linguistics ISD - management and quality studies ISD - civil engineering, geodesy and transport ISD - education ISD - environmental engineering, mining and energy ISD - information and communication technology
Number of instructors	37
Number of doctoral students undergoing training at the doctoral school (as of 6/4/25)	32

Number of supervisors in terms of guidance in preparing doctoral dissertations (as of 6/4/25)	25
Number of auxiliary supervisors in terms of guidance in preparing doctoral dissertations (as of 6/4/25)	16

## II. INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION AND ITS COURSE

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The Evaluation Team conducted an on-site visit at the Interdisciplinary Doctoral School of the University of Bielsko-Biała on 9–10 October 2025. The Team personnel were all present, as appointed by the Science Evaluation Committee, namely:

- dr hab. Wojciech Guz – chair
- dr hab. Katarzyna Krot – secretary
- Prof. dr hab. Monika Jakubus
- dr hab. Wioletta Adamus-Białek
- dr hab. inż. Hubert Gożewski
- mgr inż. Michał Klimczyk

The visit included meetings with representatives of the university, the doctoral school, and doctoral candidates, as well as an analysis of the documentation provided by the Doctoral School. All meetings were held in accordance with the previously agreed detailed schedule, which had been sent to the Doctoral School well in advance and approved by them. Due to the range of issues raised during the meetings, the duration of some of them was extended, as indicated below. The schedule was as follows (including the extended meeting times):

### 9 October 2025:

- ☒ 9:00–10:00: Meeting with the Director of the Doctoral School and the University authorities
- ☒ 10:15–13:15: (extended by 30 minutes) Meeting with the team preparing the self-evaluation report, the administrative staff, and the Scientific Council of the Doctoral School
- ☒ 13:45–16:15: (extended by 30 minutes) Analysis of individual research plans, syllabi, mid-term evaluation documentation, admission procedures, results of anonymous teaching-quality surveys, and the list of doctoral candidates' achievements

### 10 October 2025:

- ☒ 9:00–10:30: (extended by 30 minutes) Meeting with academic teachers at the Doctoral School, academic supervisors, and representatives of the Discipline Councils represented in the Doctoral School
- ☒ 10:30–11:30: Meeting with doctoral candidates and the Doctoral Students' Council
- ☒ 11:30–11:45: Internal debriefing of the Evaluation Team
- ☒ 11:45–12:15: Final meeting with the Director of the Doctoral School and the Rector supervising the Doctoral School

The University of Bielsko-Biała provided the Evaluation Team with favourable working conditions.

The Doctoral School authorities remained available to the Team throughout the visit, offering assistance whenever needed. The meeting with academic teachers, supervisors, and representatives of the Discipline Councils, as well as the meeting with doctoral candidates and the Doctoral Students' Council, were held without the presence of the Doctoral School authorities. Each meeting was attended by a representative group of participants selected appropriately to the nature of the session. All meetings took place in a calm atmosphere, with a high level of engagement and active participation from the academic community of the Doctoral School, which enabled the Evaluation Team to obtain the necessary information and to understand the specificity and character of the evaluated school.

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

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Cooperation should be assessed positively in view of mutual satisfaction with the existing relations, which is largely influenced by the nature of the evaluated doctoral school and the close and partnership relations between the staff and doctoral students. Doctoral students are members of the University's bodies, both within and outside the statutory scope.

Once a year, the council, in cooperation with the authorities, conducts a survey in which doctoral students can participate voluntarily. On a scale of 1-5, it is possible to evaluate: the training program, lecturers, cooperation with supervisors, cooperation with the discipline council, the recruitment procedure, the assistance of the ISD management in the completion of the doctoral thesis, procedures related to examination, the procedure for the "periodic evaluation", and the chance to complete the doctoral thesis within 6 years from the start of education. In addition, the survey can be accompanied by a verbal comment providing suggestions on possible issues to be addressed, such as financial support, teaching methods, and proposed support rules.

The structure of the survey should be assessed positively, as it raises necessary issues and leaves room for comments. It should be pointed out that the survey needs to use appropriate terms and recommend that the possibility of completing a doctoral dissertation within the basic time frame (4 years) rather than the extended time frame (6 years) be explored. In addition, the survey consists of a table with a scale of 1 to 6, where 6 means "no opinion," which may be misleading.

Based on the survey results, the ISD has taken development measures such as introducing representatives of the Council to mid-term evaluation and recruitment committee meetings. The survey reports contain many conclusions regarding the needs of doctoral students, but no examples of their implementation have been presented.

The ISD presented documentation confirming the implementation of the statutory powers of the doctoral student council in terms of agreeing on the candidate for the Director of IDS, agreeing on the content of the school's regulations, and issuing opinions on the education program. The council may apply for funding from the IDS Director. The unit provides additional financial support mechanisms, which are granted by the IDS Council at the request of doctoral students.

The ISD does not provide the Council with the possibility to exercise its statutory powers regarding the distribution of funds allocated for doctoral students' affairs, the disposal of financial resources by the doctoral student council, the expression of opinions on the criteria for the periodic evaluation of employees, or the approval of candidates for the position of vice-rector responsible for doctoral students.

Changes to be implemented:

1. ensuring that the Doctoral Student Council is able to exercise its statutory powers in the following areas:

- a. allocation of funds earmarked by the University for doctoral student matters,
- b. provision of financial resources to be managed by the Council as part of its activity,
- c. expressing opinions on the criteria for the periodic evaluation of employees,
- d. agreeing of a person to perform managerial functions whose responsibilities include doctoral student affairs – also within the scope of the relevant vice-rector,

- 2. conducting periodic training for management staff and doctoral students in the field of higher education and science law;
- 3. reviewing internal procedures and acts for compliance with the law;
- 4. implementing conclusions from the doctoral student opinion survey;
- 5. aligning the terms used in the doctoral student survey with the terminology used in legislation and regulations and increasing the space for verbal comments and improving the survey scale in terms of its clarity (currently: 6 – no opinion);
- 6. assessment of the chances of completing doctoral work within the basic time limit, rather than an extended one.

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

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- **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:**  
The adequacy of the educational program and the Individual Research Plan (IPB) to the learning outcomes for qualifications at level 8 of the Polish Qualifications Framework (PRK) is based on five different dimensions, as described in detail in the Regulation of the Minister of Education and Science of 27 September 2021 on the evaluation of the quality of education at doctoral schools (Journal of Laws 2021, item 1847) (henceforth "Regulation"). The data presented in the Self-Evaluation Report of the Interdisciplinary Doctoral School (ISD) operating at UBB are not fully consistent and adequate in relation to these dimensions.

In general, the ISD curriculum ensures the adequacy of learning outcomes for qualifications at level 8 of the PRK. The curriculum, through a wide range of elective courses, enables the implementation of interdisciplinarity in the educational process at the School.

Since 2023, a single coherent curriculum has been developed for IDS doctoral students representing 10 different disciplines, organized into four Modules. The general assumptions and principles of education are included in the Curriculum attached to the Self-Evaluation Report. It includes both compulsory and elective courses, with the latter being implemented based on the decision/choice of the majority of doctoral students. Classes are conducted primarily in Polish.

The learning outcomes (Chapter III of the Curriculum) have been developed separately for each Module. This approach is inappropriate, particularly given that the learning outcome matrix has been prepared for individual disciplines within the four Modules. To ensure transparency, learning outcomes should be developed separately for each discipline.

The framework curriculum includes didactics (Module 3) as well as participation of doctoral students in scientific seminars/lectures by visiting professors (Module 4). Both didactics and scientific seminars are assigned the highest number of hours—120 and 210 respectively—as well as high ECTS values (8 and 7). This raises some concerns, especially when the unclear system of assessment and verification of participation in such activities is considered.

There is a lack of a schedule of seminars and lectures conducted by visiting professors, as well as no information on the verification of their competencies. The form and mode of assessment for these courses have also not been defined. Additionally, during the ISD visitation, it was found that participation in conferences organized at UBB is treated as participation in a seminar. It was also noted that all submitted syllabi require correction and supplementation with basic information such as: course leader, course content, literature, assessment form, and proper assignment of course content to the symbols of learning outcomes. The syllabi, like other documents related to the functioning of ISD, should be made publicly available on the ISD website.

The above-mentioned issues reduce the reliability of the curriculum improvement process and, consequently, should be corrected in order to fully align with the learning outcomes for qualifications at level 8 of the PRK.

In Chapter I, §3 of the Curriculum, it is stated that education at ISD creates conditions for the implementation of the IPB, and that its submission in the form of an outline with assumptions is a prerequisite for passing the first year. These provisions are consistent with Article 201 of the Law on Higher Education and Science (Journal of Laws 2018, item 1668). However, the analysis of the IPBs indicates a lack of diligence in preparing and monitoring doctoral students' progress in implementing their research plans. It is also difficult to reliably assess the consistency of the IPBs with the learning outcomes at level 8 of the PRK. During the visitation, such weaknesses were observed in the majority of IPBs, which were brief, poorly structured, and lacked essential information regarding the research schedule. Inadequate preparation of IPBs hinders their verification and the monitoring of research progress, calling into question the proper implementation of comprehensive doctoral education. The lack of precision in developing the IRPs is inconsistent with Article 202 of the Law on Higher Education and Science (Journal of Laws 2018, item 1668). Considering the above, the adequacy of doctoral students' scientific activities described in the IPBs in relation to the learning outcomes is only partially satisfactory.

**Recommendations:**

1. introduce mandatory courses conducted in English;
2. introduce a standardized IPB template including, among others, research objectives, methodology, and a detailed schedule;
3. introduce a standardized course syllabus template;
4. develop learning outcomes for individual disciplines;
5. revise the curriculum to include a plan/schedule of lectures delivered by visiting professors;
6. clarify information regarding assessment conditions, the form of instruction, and the number of hours of teaching activities.

- **The method of assessing the learning outcomes for qualifications at level 8 of the PQF:**  
In accordance with the Regulation, the criteria for assessing the methods of verifying learning outcomes are as follows:
  - a) accessibility and clarity of verification rules,
  - b) transparency and reliability of the verification process,
  - c) reliability of the process for improving verification methods.

The verification rules are available on the School's website (together with the annex). Moreover, according to the Self-Evaluation Report, the rules for verifying learning outcomes are discussed by the Director of the Doctoral School (ISD) during regular face-to-face meetings with doctoral candidates. Therefore, the accessibility of the verification rules should be assessed positively.

The verification of learning outcomes at the ISD UBB takes place throughout the entire course of study, as confirmed in the annual reports submitted by doctoral candidates, including the Individual Research Plan (IPB), reports on teaching activities, progress reports on research work, the mid-term evaluation report, and the final doctoral report, which is also a prerequisite for initiating the doctoral degree procedure (Annex 5). The multi-stage nature of this process indicates that it is reliable.

The general concept of the final stage of verifying learning outcomes is reasonably well explained in Annex 5 (establishment and procedure of the disciplinary verification committee). However, certain ambiguities remain. According to the information published on the website, the learning outcomes for qualifications at level 8 of the Polish Qualifications Framework (PRK) are verified based on:

- documents submitted by the candidate (application for initiation of the procedure; documents confirming the attainment of qualifications; other documents that, in the candidate's opinion, demonstrate their knowledge, skills, and social competences),
- an examination in the discipline corresponding to the subject of the doctoral dissertation,
- a supplementary examination in another discipline and a modern language examination, unless the candidate has provided a certificate or other document confirming knowledge of a foreign language at the B2 level – these examinations apply in the external (non-school) mode,
- an interview with the candidate.

While the first two points are relatively clear, the School's documentation provides no additional information regarding the supplementary examination (point 3) and the interview with the candidate (point 4). Therefore, the criteria of clarity of verification rules and transparency of the verification process are only partially met.

The verification rules also appear to differ between the disciplines in which education is offered. In the supplements to the Self-Evaluation Report, it is stated that "each field, and specifically each discipline, sets its own requirements regarding the achievement of individual learning outcomes by doctoral candidates. The flexible education system allows each candidate, under the guidance of a supervisor, to adapt to the requirements of the disciplinary councils concerning the fulfilment of qualifications at level 8 of the PRK." It should be ensured

that the requirements of all disciplines refer to common verification rules and uniformly correspond to PRK level 8.

With regard to the reliability of the verification process, it should be noted that both the Self-Evaluation Report and the template of the application submitted by doctoral candidates contain unfortunate wording suggesting that candidates themselves attest to meeting statutory requirements, including the achievement of learning outcomes:

“Regarding Article 186(1)(1–3) and (5) or Article 186(2) of the Act, I hereby declare that I meet the statutory formal requirements for the conferment of the doctoral degree.”

“Regarding the descriptors of the second degree learning outcomes for qualifications at level 8 of the Polish Qualifications Framework, [...] I hereby declare that I have achieved all the learning outcomes defined in the above-mentioned regulation.”

(Annex 5, Application Template No. 1)

The Self-Evaluation Report provides a fairly detailed description of the process of improving methods for verifying learning outcomes at the ISD. However, some of the measures listed are only loosely related to the enhancement of verification procedures. A positive step is the modernisation of the IPB form and the addition of more detailed information concerning “the timetable and costs of individual activities carried out during the preparation of the doctoral dissertation.”

#### **Recommendations:**

1. provide a clear and comprehensive description of the entire process of verifying learning outcomes in the relevant internal regulations;
2. specify all components of the verification process, in particular the “supplementary examination in another discipline” and the “interview with the candidate” (clarify also whether completing required courses and passing examinations throughout the study programme constitutes part of this process);
3. standardise the general principles of verifying learning outcomes across all disciplines in which education is provided;
4. remove or modify wording in internal documents implying that doctoral candidates self-certify compliance with statutory requirements, including the achievement of learning outcomes;
5. ensure continuous monitoring of verification methods and undertake actions to improve them;
6. prepare an English version of the documents relating to the verification of learning outcomes.

- **Qualification of academic teachers and academic staff employed at the doctoral school:** The method of selecting teaching staff, including the analysis of their scientific achievements and research activity in relation to the scope of doctoral education, requires improvement. The documents presented in the ISD UBB Self-Assessment Report, as well as those made available to the Evaluation Team during the site visit, indicate that the process of selecting teaching staff involved in doctoral education is carried out in stages. In this process, the School Director selects instructors based on their scientific achievements and the subject matter of the courses, and then recommends the candidates to the ISD UBB Scientific Council, informing the Deans of his choice. However, it is unclear what criteria are considered when selecting individual lecturers; there is a lack of information on, among other things, the alignment of their education with the courses taught, professional experience, or relevant qualifications (certificates, pedagogical courses, teaching training). It is also unknown whether, in assessing scientific achievements and research activity, parameters such as the number of scientific publications (MNISW scoring, Impact Factor, citations, Hirsch index); participation in research projects, grants, conferences; supervision of theses; or the impact of research on the development of the discipline or professional practice are taken into account.

Actions to support the professional development of teaching staff and promotores, including assistant promotores, need to be intensified. ISD UBB lacks practices that encourage the development of teaching staff and promotores. Teaching staff are only marginally involved in social activities and science popularization. In principle, there is no ongoing collaboration between ISD UBB and foreign lecturers, including those of international renown, who could systematically conduct seminars and/or thematic lectures.

Actions undertaken by ISD UBB to verify the qualifications of teaching staff and promotores, including assistant promotores, are moderate. ISD UBB declares that qualification verification is carried out in a credible and reliable manner through class observations and surveys. This approach to assessing academic staff qualifications and the quality of classes is positively perceived and accepted by the doctoral student community. Nevertheless, the Team did not obtain information on the impact of survey and observation results on changes and/or raising teaching standards. The assessment of teaching effectiveness and the ability to work with doctoral students should also include an evaluation of the creation of modern, innovative, and engaging teaching methods, which the Team also did not note. Doctoral students emphasize the friendliness and support provided by the teaching staff and UBB's technical-administrative staff. ISD UBB implements and adheres to the "master–student" model, which fits into the intimate system of education in this doctoral school. ISD UBB declares that no disputes have been recorded between doctoral students and teaching staff, including thesis supervisors and assistant thesis supervisors.

#### **Recommendations:**

1. develop and implement transparent criteria for selecting teaching staff;
2. introduce support and monitoring of scientific and non-scientific activities of teaching staff, thesis supervisors, and assistant thesis supervisors;
3. initiate and develop good practices for academic exchange to attract foreign lecturers;

4. develop and implement a feedback system following class observations and surveys.

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

The first specific criterion is partially fulfilled. The quality and availability of information and internal regulations regarding the functioning of the ISD are sufficient to familiarize oneself with the requirements for ISD candidates. The curriculum and necessary documents that must be submitted by the candidate and doctoral candidate at various stages of the procedure or study are presented. However, not all legal acts related to the functioning of the ISD are readily available. Clear criteria for appointing recruitment committees are lacking; in the ISD documentation, recruitment committees consist of three to eight members, and the documents regulating this are inconsistent. The ISD Director serves as a member of each recruitment committee, simultaneously issuing subsequent decisions to reject candidates. Education is conducted solely in Polish, which limits the recruitment of foreigners. Therefore, the Team recommends the following:

1. publish all current documents or their links regarding all ISD procedures, resolutions, and rector's orders on the ISD website;
2. define clear criteria for appointing the recruitment committee, including the number of committee members, their qualifications, and powers. The recruitment committee, authorized by the rector, should have the right to decide on a candidate's admission to the ISD, which is achieved by entering them on the list of doctoral students. The ISD director may participate in this procedure as the chairperson or a member of the committee. However, the director cannot simultaneously serve as a member of the recruitment committee and issue administrative decisions refusing admission (which is only possible with the rector's authorization). Participation on the committee would constitute participation in the first-instance review of the case, which excludes them from signing the administrative decision (Article 24, Section 1, Item 5 of the Code of Administrative Procedure);
3. introduce a rule according to which the future supervisor or assistant supervisor does not participate in the evaluation of their own PhD candidate;
4. it is recommended that all the documents concerning the recruitment process be prepared in English.

In terms of the accessibility, clarity, and openness of ISD recruitment rules and the timeliness of their publication, the criterion was not fully met, as was the 3rd criterion (The method of conducting the competition referred to in Article 200, paragraph 2 of the Act of 20 July 2018 – The Law on Higher Education and Science). The procedures described in the documents and published on the ISD website concern a clear description of the recruitment procedure and the evaluation of candidates up to the point of the interview and preparation of ranking lists. The subsequent stages of the recruitment process are not published, and the terms and conditions for further proceedings, particularly the conditions and criteria for admission to the ISD, and the ISD admission limits, have not been formalized. The ISD offer indicates the possibility of conducting a doctoral dissertation in the discipline that has announced a list of research topics. In response to this, recruitment committees for a given discipline are appointed. According to the procedure, the recruitment committee awards points to candidates based on the verified qualifications presented in the submitted documents and the interview, after which

a ranking list of candidates is prepared. Further stages of the recruitment process are not described in the procedures and depend on both the opinion and decision of the ISD Director. The ranking lists are submitted to the ISD Scientific Council meeting, which votes to accept or reject individual candidates based on the opinion of the ISD Director, who reviews the qualifications of each candidate. On average, ISD admits six doctoral students per year, only in selected disciplines, regardless of the candidate's score. The announcement of ISD recruitment in a given discipline and the submission of the ranking list of candidates does not initiate the education process in that discipline. Therefore, recommendations include:

1. determine the formal requirements that a candidate must meet to advance to the next stage of the merit-based evaluation. During the merit-based evaluation, it is recommended to establish a minimum score that a candidate must achieve to qualify for admission;
2. establish a cap on the number of doctoral students admitted to the ISD in a given academic year, in the discipline that announces admissions;
3. include the requirement for admission committees to prepare ranking lists of candidates with assigned points and to indicate those candidates recommended for admission by the committee based on the admission cap and the highest score. If a candidate is admitted to the ISD – which occurs through entry on the list of doctoral students and is therefore an internal decision of the university – the admission committee may sign such a decision with the authorization of the rector;
4. develop and publish clear criteria and conditions for admission to the ISD. Admission should be conditional upon meeting formal requirements and achieving a place on the ranking list within the specified admission limit (based on the number of points obtained in the admissions process);
5. consider the possibility of admitting candidates from the reserve list of another discipline if the doctoral student quota in the discipline is not met or if candidates do not meet the formal or substantive requirements (minimum number of points). Candidates from other disciplines may only fill the quota upon request of the relevant admissions committee to the ISD director;
6. if the Director does not accept the PhD student committee's recommendation, they should provide a substantive justification to ensure the transparency of the recruitment process and the candidate's right to information about the reasons for non-admission. The ISD Director's participation in the selection committee should be considered. In the event of a refusal of admission, which constitutes an administrative decision of the rector (which may be subject to a request for reconsideration), the decision is signed by the rector or another authorized person, but not a member of the committee. In this case, if the director participates in the first-instance proceedings, they are subject to exclusion under Article 24 § 1 item 5 of the Code of Administrative Procedure and may not issue a non-admission decision;
7. issue written decisions on non-admission to ISD candidates within two weeks of the completion of the recruitment process, at the same time as the lists of admitted doctoral students;
8. prepare and publish an appeals procedure for candidates who are not admitted to ISD in the ISD legal documents and on the ISD website;
9. the Team emphasizes that, due to UBB's financial policy and scientific development strategy, recruitment to the ISD may only take place for selected disciplines, but with sufficient advance notice of the educational offer in a given discipline, and only for those disciplines, through recruitment committees appointed in a given academic year. This information should

be readily available to candidates and announced on the UBB ISD website no later than six months before the start of recruitment.

In the case of the specific criterion, "How the needs of people with disabilities are considered during recruitment," it was found that ISD adapts spatial conditions to accommodate people with mobility impairments, and people with hearing impairments can also use sign language interpreters. ISD introduces tools to assist people with other disabilities and responds promptly to individual needs related to health limitations.

The specific criterion, "Method of verifying the predisposition of ISD candidates to conduct scientific activity," was found to be met. During the interview, candidates are assessed based on their scientific idea, presentation, scientific achievements, and prospects for development. The selection committee members have carefully selected parameters to verify the candidate's predisposition to further scientific development.

The specific criterion, "Reliability of actions undertaken by the entity operating the doctoral school to improve the recruitment process," is only partially met. The new ISD regulations have been expanded to include a procedure for recruiting foreigners and the educational offerings have been expanded to 10 disciplines. However, two appeals have been recorded in the history of ISD – one application was dismissed after the candidate spoke with the ISD Director.

However, no document explaining this event was prepared, and the reason for the appeal is unknown, nor was the entity's response to the validity of the decision upheld. The second appeal was processed due to the candidate's requests for clarification of the reasons for the rejection to ISD, and the candidate only received the rejection decision upon request. The two recorded cases and their subsequent history indicate that no appeals procedure has been developed, and the rejection decisions do not clearly indicate their justification. Furthermore, the recorded discrimination complaints should have been subject to an explanatory procedure in disciplinary proceedings, but they were not resolved in the subsequent proceedings and concluded with a response from the ISD Director upholding the appealed decision. Therefore, we recommend that:

1. the School develops a clear appeals procedure and clear criteria for deciding whether to reject admission to the ISD;
2. the response to a candidate's appeal should include a justification for rejection.

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

The Regulations of the Interdisciplinary Doctoral School of the University of Bielsko-Biała, attached to the Self-Evaluation Report (Resolution No. 1903/02/VIII/2025 of the Senate of the University of Bielsko-Biała dated 18 February 2025), define the rules for the appointment and replacement of supervisors and assistant supervisors. During the first years of the IDS's operation, the appointment and change of supervisors were decided by the Scientific Discipline Councils, while the Director of the School had an advisory role. In the past year, however (following Resolution No. 1903/02/VIII/2025 of the Senate of the University of Bielsko-Biała dated 18 February 2025), the situation has changed: it is now the Director of the IDS who single-handedly makes decisions concerning the appointment and replacement of supervisors and assistant supervisors, while the Scientific Discipline Council acts only in an advisory capacity. The reasons for this change are unclear.

The selection of supervisors and assistant supervisors is a key factor determining the effectiveness and quality of education within the ISD, as well as shaping the nature of the relationship between the academic advisor and the doctoral student. Therefore, as indicated in the Self-Evaluation Report, the relevant Scientific Discipline Council conducts a substantive and organizational assessment of the research topics proposed by prospective supervisors.

The IDS ensures the quality of the relationship between doctoral students and their supervisors by including in its Regulations detailed guidelines specifying the supervisor's duties. Moreover, as indicated in the Self-Evaluation Report, the quality of cooperation between supervisors and doctoral students is additionally assessed based on student surveys, classroom observations, and the timeliness of dissertation defenses. Supervisors are also required to sign a declaration of impartiality and disinterestedness in their relationship with the doctoral student. All the measures described above appear sufficient to ensure a high standard of relations between doctoral students and their supervisors. However, the Evaluation Team had doubts about the actual effectiveness of the methods used to identify difficulties in cooperation between doctoral students and their supervisors. The questions included in the survey seem to assess doctoral students' opinions on their relationships with supervisors only superficially, as they are formulated in an imprecise and overly general manner.

Furthermore, despite the declaration in the Regulations that survey results are discussed during ISD Council meetings, the Team was unable to obtain information during the site visit on what types of corrective actions, if any, had been implemented in response to students' feedback. It is worth noting, however, that during the Team's meeting with doctoral students, they spoke very positively about their collaboration with supervisors, emphasizing their exceptional commitment, willingness to help, openness, and support. According to the statement of the ISD Director, there have so far been no conflict situations, and therefore no procedures or measures have been developed to address potential conflicts between supervisors/the ISD and doctoral students.

According to the declarations of the authorities and the provisions of the Regulations, the functioning of the ISD is consistent with the principles of social responsibility and inclusiveness toward persons with special needs that apply throughout the UBB.

So far, ISD has provided only limited support to doctoral students in their research activities from specialists employed outside the UBB.

**Recommendations:**

1. revise the questionnaire items so that they genuinely assess the quality of relationships and the functioning of the ISD;
2. develop a strategy for engaging specialists employed outside the University of Bielsko-Biała and for enhancing collaboration with them;
3. establish procedures for conflict resolution within the ISD;
4. modernize the system for improving the quality of academic supervision.

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

In accordance with the Regulations in force during the evaluation period, the basis for assessment is the doctoral student's report and an abstract describing the implementation of the IPB. The assessment consists of an evaluation of the broadly understood development of the doctoral student (knowledge and skills) and progress in the implementation of the IPB. This solution should be considered inconsistent with the provisions of the Act.

The mid-term evaluation concerns the implementation of the individual research plan, and not a substantive assessment of the doctoral student's development – therefore, the criteria should be considered inappropriate and biased. The criteria for the mid-term evaluation are not clear – they do not specify precisely what factors determine a positive or negative evaluation.

According to the Regulations, decisions on admitting a doctoral student to the mid-term evaluation are made by the Director, which has no basis in the Act. The rules for mid-term evaluation are not publicly available in English.

The rules for mid-term evaluation are not clearly formulated – they do not include, among other things, regulations related to key deadlines.

According to the doctoral school regulations, the mid-term evaluation is carried out by an evaluation committee consisting of 5 representatives of the scientific discipline in which the doctoral dissertation is being prepared, appointed by the Scientific Discipline Council, including at least 2 independent researchers, one representative of the ISD UBB Council, and one person with a postdoctoral degree or the title of professor in the discipline in which the doctoral dissertation is being prepared, who is not an employee of UBB.

The composition of the committee conducting the mid-term evaluation is inconsistent with the law, which states that: the mid-term evaluation is conducted by a committee consisting of 3 persons. Therefore, it is not possible to assess whether the requirement regarding the competence of the committee conducting the mid-term evaluation has been met (this requirement refers to a 3-person composition).

Mid-term evaluations of doctoral students take place in September, which allows the mid-term evaluations to be assessed as timely.

Taking into account the above reservations regarding the compliance of the rules for conducting the mid-term evaluation with the provisions of the Act, the manner in which it is conducted should be assessed as definitely negative.

As part of its development activities, the Unit ensured that a representative of the doctoral student council could participate in the assessment as an observer, which should be assessed positively. The measures taken by the entity operating the doctoral school to improve the mid-term evaluation process should be assessed as unreliable due to the fact that they did not allow for the identification of obvious inconsistencies with the provisions of the Act.

**Recommendations:**

1. aligning the mid-term evaluation criteria with the provisions of the Act – the evaluation should only concern the implementation of the individual research plan;
2. clearly formulating the rules and criteria for mid-term evaluation by specifying the deadlines for the evaluation procedure and the grounds for receiving a positive or negative evaluation;
3. adjusting the composition of the mid-term evaluation committee to the provisions of the Act – by appointing a 3-member committee with the competences specified in the Act;
4. removing from the Doctoral School Regulations the provisions allowing the Director of the School to exclude a doctoral student from mid-term evaluation;
5. conducting periodic training for management staff and doctoral students in the field of higher education and science law;
6. reviewing procedures and internal acts for compliance with the law;
7. making the Regulations of the Doctoral School available on the University's website in English.

- **Internationalisation:**

Internationalization of the teaching staff is implemented at the Doctoral School (IDS) to a moderate degree. In recent years, most teaching staff and supervisors have completed short-term scientific and teaching mobilities at universities in Europe (e.g., Spain, Italy, Hungary, Greece, Lithuania) and beyond (e.g., Turkey) under the Erasmus+ program. The staff is effective in maintaining teaching cooperation (academic exchanges) and research collaboration (scientific projects) with universities in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, with which it has long-standing ties. Overall participation of teaching staff and supervisors in successfully obtaining internationally recognized research grants is limited, signaling the need to increase activity in this area. The presence of teaching staff and supervisors in international networks, scientific societies, and conferences is fairly visible and contributes to building international cooperation.

Internationalization of the education process and doctoral students' scientific activities is implemented at the IDS to a degree requiring further development. Currently, foreign lecturers do not teach courses included in the mandatory IDS curriculum, although doctoral students attend lectures by visiting foreign professors (Module 4). The Doctoral School offers only a small number of courses in English but emphasizes its aspiration to gradually increase the number of courses taught in this language. IDS training modules partly include internationalization components. In the analyzed Individual Research Plans, internationalization elements are mostly limited to participation in conferences and publishing papers, which needs to be expanded to include short-term foreign internships or applications for international grants involving doctoral students. Support for doctoral students in applying for research grants is provided by the university's research office. The UBB Main Library provides doctoral students with access to commercial databases and scientific journals, both remotely and on-site.

The Doctoral School has resources to be ready to consider and meet the needs of foreign doctoral students. Due to the local character of the IDS, e.g., links between the implementation of some doctoral research and industry within the Bielsko-Biała region, the IDS is currently not strongly focused on attracting foreign doctoral candidates. Although contact with the IDS in English is possible and recruitment committees are prepared to admit foreign candidates, the IDS website, admission rules and procedures, IDS regulations, IDS curriculum, and other relevant legal acts are available only in Polish. One foreign doctoral student is enrolled at the DS, which represents a noticeable step toward increasing the participation of international doctoral students in the program and conducting doctoral research at UBB.

The international visibility and effectiveness of the Doctoral School are noticeable but require improvement. The University of Bielsko-Biała runs an effective social media campaign promoting the university. Its positive image is built through ongoing communication about the successes of students, doctoral candidates, and staff, but mainly in Polish. Currently, the IDS does not have a formalized process for maintaining and tracking the career paths of its graduates; this is done at the level of personal graduate-supervisor contacts.

**Recommendations:**

1. expand permanent research and teaching cooperation to improve the internationalization of the teaching staff;
2. increase the focus on internationalization elements in the education process and doctoral students' scientific activities;
3. introduce motivational mechanisms for doctoral students to intensify activities related to applying for research projects, including international ones;
4. introduce adjustments enabling the admission of foreign doctoral students to ISD, e.g. the ISD website, the rules and procedure for admission, the regulations, the curriculum and other relevant legal acts of ISD require translation into English;
5. expand IDS promotional activities in English to highlight opportunities for foreigners to pursue doctorates.

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

The effectiveness of doctoral education is an important element allowing for the assessment of the institutional effectiveness of a doctoral school, which should be considered from five different perspectives, described in detail in the Regulation. Statistics provided in the Self-Assessment Report of the ISD UBB indicate a partially satisfactory effectiveness of doctoral education at the School, as the percentage of those who obtained a doctoral degree after completing their doctoral education was 21.5% (3 out of 14). It can be assumed that this share will increase to 50%, as data provided by the IDS indicate that another 4 individuals have already submitted their theses and there is a high probability of finalizing the procedure and obtaining a doctoral degree. The values indicated above are a consequence of late submissions to the Scientific Discipline Councils, which currently affect seven individuals who missed the standard deadline for submitting their doctoral dissertations. According to the Evaluation Team, the School should initiate corrective procedures in this area to increase the motivation of doctoral students to submit their doctoral dissertations on time.

The level of doctoral students' scientific achievements was not included in the ISD Self-Assessment Report, but such documentation was provided during the inspection. After reviewing it, the level of doctoral students' scientific achievements can generally be assessed positively. However, it should be emphasized that not every discipline demonstrates a significant impact of research on the development of a given discipline or an increase in the quality of research. Generally, there is no comprehensive summary of research achievements during doctoral education, including basic data such as: number of publications (e.g., in journals listed by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, and Scopus); participation in conferences; submitted and implemented projects and research grants; and patents and implementations. ISD allows doctoral students to assess the quality of their education through anonymous surveys regarding the broadly understood education and the School's functioning within the University. Implementing such procedures should be considered good practice, meeting the requirements of the Regulation. However, there is no information on the impact of these surveys on the effectiveness of doctoral education, particularly regarding their use by the institution to improve the educational process. There are no reports on the regularity and quality of meetings with supervisors, the effectiveness of these contacts, or support from supervisors.

ISD also did not present data on the monitoring of doctoral students' professional careers. This is important because conducting such activities allows for the assessment of whether the ISD's educational structure supports doctoral students' success, satisfaction, and professional position after obtaining a doctoral degree. In this regard, the School should develop and implement an appropriate system to meet the requirements for evaluating the quality of education in accordance with the provisions of the Regulation.

**Recommendations:**

1. implement a system for monitoring graduates' professional careers;
2. establish panels on the quality of doctoral education, with the participation of supervisors and external experts, to improve the timeliness of dissertation submissions;

3. introduce a mandatory feedback system based on surveys;
4. develop and share a detailed database of doctoral students' achievements that impact the development of a given discipline (doctoral portfolio);
5. increase the motivation of doctoral students to submit their doctoral dissertations on time;
6. in terms of scientific achievements, particularly those related to the activities included in the IPB, increase the motivation of those doctoral students whose achievements lag behind others.

# V. FINAL OPINION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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Taking into account the overall analysis of the functioning of the Interdisciplinary Doctoral School of the University of Bielsko-Biała, in light of the requirements set out in the Regulation, the Evaluation Team issues a positive assessment of the quality of education provided by the School. At the same time, the Team recommends that another evaluation be conducted within two years of the date on which the resolution of the Science Evaluation Committee regarding this evaluation becomes final. The Team's position stems from the identification of faults that go against the law and established practice. The recommendations made by the Evaluation Team should be implemented promptly.

The Team's recommendations are presented collectively below:

## **Regarding cooperation with the Doctoral Students' Council:**

KS\_1 ensuring that the Doctoral Student Council is able to exercise its statutory powers in the following areas:

- a. allocation of funds earmarked by the University for doctoral student matters,
- b. provision of financial resources to be managed by the Council as part of its activity,
- c. expressing opinions on the criteria for the periodic evaluation of employees,
- d. agreeing of a person to perform managerial functions whose responsibilities include doctoral student affairs – also within the scope of the relevant vice-rector,

KS\_2 conducting periodic training for management staff and doctoral students in the field of higher education and science law;

KS\_3 reviewing internal procedures and acts for compliance with the law;

4. implementing conclusions from the doctoral student opinion survey;

KS\_4 aligning the terms used in the doctoral student survey with the terminology used in legislation and regulations and increasing the space for verbal comments and improving the survey scale in terms of its clarity (currently: 6 – "no opinion");

KS\_5 assess the chances of completing doctoral work within the basic time limit, rather than an extended one.

## **Regarding criterion 1:**

K1\_1 introduce mandatory courses conducted in English;

K1\_2 introduce a standardized IRP template including, among others, research objectives, methodology, and a detailed schedule;

K1\_3 introduce a standardized course syllabus template;

K1\_4 develop learning outcomes for individual disciplines;

K1\_5 revise the curriculum to include a plan/schedule of lectures delivered by visiting professors;

K1\_6 clarify information regarding assessment conditions, the form of instruction, and the number of hours of teaching activities.

**Regarding criterion 2:**

K2\_1 provide a clear and comprehensive description of the entire process of verifying learning outcomes in the relevant internal regulations;

K2\_2 specify all components of the verification process, in particular the “supplementary examination in another discipline” and the “interview with the candidate” (clarify also whether completing required courses and passing examinations throughout the study programme constitutes part of this process);

K2\_3 standardise the general principles of verifying learning outcomes across all disciplines in which education is provided;

K2\_4 remove or modify wording in internal documents implying that doctoral candidates self-certify compliance with statutory requirements, including the achievement of learning outcomes;

K2\_5 ensure continuous monitoring of verification methods and undertake actions to improve them;

K2\_6 prepare an English version of the documents relating to the verification of learning outcomes.

**Regarding criterion 3:**

K3\_1 develop and implement transparent criteria for selecting teaching staff;

K3\_2 introduce support and monitoring of scientific and non-scientific activities of teaching staff, thesis supervisors, and assistant thesis supervisor;

K3\_3 initiate and develop good practices for academic exchange to attract foreign lecturers;

K3\_4 develop and implement a feedback system following class observations and surveys.

**Regarding criterion 4:**

K4\_1 make all current procedures, resolutions, and rector's orders related to the functioning of the ISD available on the ISD website;

K4\_2 define clear criteria for appointing the recruitment committee, including the number of committee members, their qualifications, and authority;

K4\_3 establish the role of the ISD Director in the recruitment process – the Director as a committee member without the ability to issue administrative decisions or exclude the Director from the recruitment committee;

K4\_4 introduce a rule according to which the future supervisor or assistant supervisor does not participate in the evaluation of their own PhD candidate;

K4\_5 prepare all recruitment documents in English;

K4\_6 define the formal requirements that a candidate must meet to advance to the next stage of the merit-based evaluation. It is advisable to specify the minimum number of points a candidate must achieve to qualify for admission;

K4\_7 establish a limit on the number of doctoral students admitted to the ISD in a given academic year, in a given discipline that announces recruitment;

K4\_8 introduce into the admissions process the preparation of ranking lists of candidates with assigned points and an indication of those candidates recommended for admission by the committee based on the admissions quota and the highest points obtained;

K4\_9 develop and publish clear criteria and conditions for admission to the ISD. Admission should be contingent upon meeting formal requirements and achieving a place on the ranking list within the specified admissions quota based on the number of points obtained in the admissions

process;

K4\_10 consider the possibility of admitting candidates from the reserve list of another discipline if the quota for doctoral students in a given discipline is not met or if candidates do not meet the formal or substantive requirements (minimum number of points);

K4\_11 issue written decisions on denial of admission to the ISD within two weeks of the recruitment process closing date;

K4\_12 recruitment to the ISD may only take place for selected disciplines, but with sufficient advance notice of the educational offer and appointment of recruitment committees for the given academic year;

K4\_13 develop an appeals procedure and clear criteria for deciding whether to reject admission to the ISD;

K4\_14 responses to candidates' appeals should include a justification for rejection.

**Regarding criterion 5:**

K5\_1 revise the questionnaire items so that they genuinely assess the quality of relationships and the functioning of the IDS;

K5\_2 develop a strategy for engaging specialists employed outside UBB and for enhancing collaboration with them;

K5\_3 establish procedures for conflict resolution within the IDS;

K5\_4 modernize the system for improving the quality of academic supervision.

**Regarding criterion 6:**

K6\_1 aligning the mid-term evaluation criteria with the provisions of the Act – the evaluation should only concern the implementation of the individual research plan;

K6\_2 clearly formulating the rules and criteria for mid-term evaluation by specifying the deadlines for the evaluation procedure and the grounds for receiving a positive or negative evaluation;

K6\_3 adjusting the composition of the mid-term evaluation committee to the provisions of the Act – by appointing a 3-member committee with the competences specified in the Act;

K6\_4 removing from the Doctoral School Regulations the provisions allowing the Director of the School to exclude a doctoral student from mid-term evaluation;

K6\_5 conducting periodic training for management staff and doctoral students in the field of higher education and science law;

**Regarding criterion 7:**

K7\_1 expand permanent research and teaching cooperation to improve the internationalization of the teaching staff;

K7\_2 increase the focus on internationalization elements in the education process and doctoral students' scientific activities;

K7\_3 introduce motivational mechanisms for doctoral students to intensify activities related to applying for research projects, including international ones;

K7\_4 introduce adjustments for foreign doctoral students, e.g. the website, relevant regulations, rules and procedure for admission, the curriculum and other relevant legal acts in ISD require translation into English;

K7\_5 expand DS promotional activities in English to highlight opportunities for foreigners to pursue doctorates.

**Regarding criterion 8:**

K8\_1 implement a system for monitoring graduates' professional careers;

K8\_2 establish panels on the quality of doctoral education, with the participation of supervisors and external experts, to improve the timeliness of dissertation submissions;

K8\_3 introduce a mandatory feedback system based on surveys;

K8\_4 develop and share a detailed database of doctoral students' achievements that impact the development of a given discipline;

K8\_5 increase the motivation of doctoral students to submit their doctoral dissertations on time;

K8\_6 in terms of scientific achievements, increase the motivation of those doctoral students whose achievements are of lower quality.

# VI. ASSESSMENT AND REASON

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## Final assessment positive

### Reason:

Based on the submitted self-assessment report and the visitation, the Evaluation Team concluded that the Interdisciplinary Doctoral School run by the University of Bielsko-Biała sufficiently met the evaluation criteria during the evaluation period. The curriculum and individual research plans correspond to the characteristics of learning outcomes for qualifications at level 8 of the Polish Qualifications Framework. The educational process is conducted by qualified academic staff. The degree of internationalization and the effectiveness of doctoral education were considered satisfactory. The concerns raised in the evaluation report regarding certain procedures and solutions employed by the ISD are aimed at further improving the School's operations. In particular, the ISD's cooperation with the doctoral students' council, as well as the recruitment and mid-term evaluation processes, require certain adjustments, in accordance with the recommendations of the Evaluation Team.

The Team also recommends conducting another evaluation of the School in two years, in accordance with Article 8, Section 1, Item 3 of the Regulation of the Minister of Education and Science of 27 September 2021 on the evaluation of the quality of education at a doctoral school (Journal of Laws of 2021, item 1847).

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