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2023-2027

DOCTORAL SCHOOL

EDUCATION QUALITY REPORT

Szkoła Doktorska Nauk Społecznych UMCS
Uniwersytet Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej w Lublinie



Name and seat of the doctoral school

Szkoła Doktorska Nauk Społecznych UMCS

Evaluation period

10/1/19–5/11/25

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

Uniwersytet Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej w Lublinie

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

-

Date of report

8/4/25

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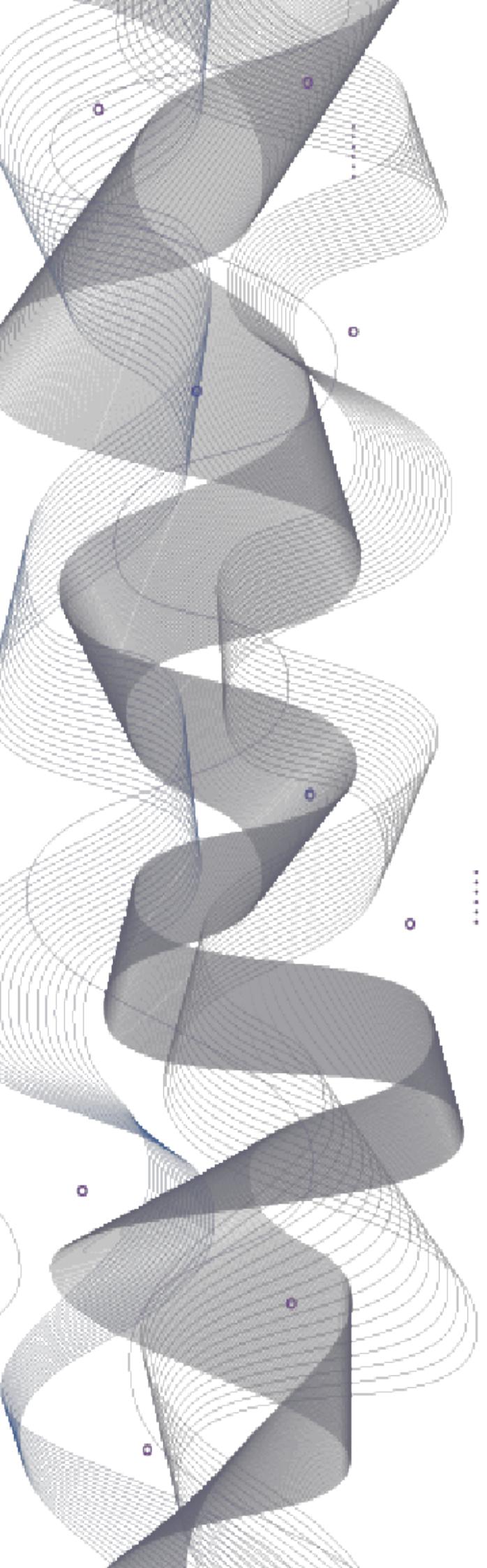


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I. GENERAL INFORMATION ON THE DOCTORAL SCHOOL

Name of doctoral school	Szkoła Doktorska Nauk Społecznych UMCS
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)	Gmina Lublin
Domains of study	Social sciences (from: 01-01-2018)
Discipline(s) of science or art in which training is provided	economics and finance (from: 01-01-2018) socio-economic geography and spatial management (from: 01-01-2018) social communication and media studies (from: 01-01-2018) political and administrative sciences (from: 01-01-2018) management and quality studies (from: 01-01-2018) law (from: 01-01-2018) sociology (from: 01-01-2018) educational sciences (from: 01-01-2018) psychology (from: 01-01-2018) international relations (from: 11-11-2022)
Name/scope of the education programme	Study Program – Doctoral School of Social Sciences I Study Program – Doctoral School of Social Sciences II Study Program – Doctoral School of Social Sciences III Study Program – Doctoral School of Social Sciences V Study Program – Doctoral School of Social Sciences IV Study Program – Doctoral School of Social Sciences VI
Number of instructors	139
Number of doctoral students undergoing training at the doctoral school (as of 8/1/25)	127
Number of supervisors in terms of guidance in preparing doctoral dissertations (as of 8/1/25)	93
Number of auxiliary supervisors in terms of guidance in preparing	43

doctoral dissertations (as of 8/1/25)

II. INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION AND ITS COURSE

The visit to the Doctoral School of Social Sciences (hereinafter: DS) took place on 16–17 October 2025 and was conducted in accordance with the schedule provided to the DS authorities well in advance.

The first point on the agenda was a meeting with representatives of the DS authorities, the UMCS authorities, and the Councils of the Disciplines. The discussion focused on the DS's development strategy, management, achievements, and the challenges associated with its current functioning. Subsequently, the Evaluation Committee reviewed the documentation prepared by the DS, followed by meetings with the team responsible for preparing the self-evaluation report and with the DS's administrative staff. This was followed by a meeting with DS lecturers, supervisors, and members of the Councils of the Disciplines represented within the DS. The first day of the visit concluded with the Evaluation Committee's analysis of doctoral students' Individual Research Plans and mid-term evaluation documentation.

The second day of the visit began with a meeting with representatives of doctoral students, the Doctoral Student Council, and DS graduates. This was followed by a final meeting with the DS authorities, during which the subsequent stages of the evaluation procedure were discussed.

The visit concluded with a summary meeting of the Evaluation Committee.

Throughout the visit, the DS authorities and administration remained fully available to the Evaluation Committee. The Committee was provided with a dedicated room where members could conduct a detailed analysis of the documentation. All scheduled meetings took place in the DS building, while the meeting with the university authorities was held in the Senate Hall of Maria Curie-Skłodowska University. The meetings were attended by a representative group of supervisors, doctoral students, members of the Doctoral Student Council, lecturers, members of the self-evaluation report preparation team, and members of the Councils of the Disciplines. The Evaluation Committee also had the opportunity to familiarise itself with the teaching and administrative infrastructure of the DS, as well as the rooms designated for doctoral students.

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

Characteristics:

Cooperation between the DS and the doctoral student council complies with statutory requirements and is systemic in nature. The doctoral student council has been provided with the organisational and material conditions necessary for its effective functioning, including financial resources and premises located in the building housing the doctoral schools. Representatives of the doctoral student council participate, *inter alia*, in the work of the DS Council and the University Senate, as well as in reviewing educational programmes and agreeing on the content of the DS regulations. The adopted solutions promote transparency in decision-making processes and strengthen mechanisms for doctoral students' participation in academic life. However, certain aspects of cooperation between the DS and the doctoral student council require further improvement. In particular, it is necessary to ensure that the doctoral student council has uninterrupted access to the rooms allocated to it, including, as far as possible, refraining from using these rooms for teaching purposes and guaranteeing doctoral students access to them in the afternoons, evenings, and at weekends. Doctoral students have pointed out that during standard academic working hours, when these rooms are technically available, they are often unable to use them due to other obligations (teaching, research).

The area of communication between the doctoral student council and the doctoral students, particularly international doctoral students, also requires improvement. It would be desirable for the DS to enable the council to communicate directly with all persons enrolled in the DS, for example by providing the council with doctoral students' e-mail addresses or by creating a mechanism allowing messages to be sent to the entire doctoral community via the USOSweb system. It is the university's responsibility to ensure the conditions necessary for the functioning of the doctoral student council.

Doctoral students also highlight the need to intensify integration and inclusion initiatives within the DS community. Together with the doctoral student council, the DS should more actively promote engagement in council activities, especially among international doctoral students who do not speak Polish. Among the proposals put forward by doctoral students are the introduction of optional Polish language classes as a means of supporting the development of the academic community, and the establishment of equal access to common areas for all doctoral students, regardless of their institute affiliation or their supervisors' organisational capacities. The current situation, in which some doctoral students have workspaces in their university units while others do not, results in tangible inequalities in access to the university's research and teaching infrastructure. Developing more uniform and transparent rules for the use of shared spaces could significantly strengthen the sense of belonging to the university and promote integration within the entire doctoral community.

Doctoral students report difficulties in their interactions with the administration supporting the doctoral programme, pointing to, among other issues, organisational and communication challenges and the limited availability of administrative staff. They also comment on the style of communication, which is sometimes perceived as unclear or uncomfortable. This may adversely

affect both the efficiency of administrative processes and doctoral students' overall experience within the DS structures.

During the visit, it was found that in some cases the doctoral programme does not sufficiently take into account the justified requests made by doctoral students and the doctoral student council, concerning, *inter alia*, the adaptation of educational programmes and teaching offerings to the actual needs and interests of doctoral candidates. In this context, it is essential to ensure more transparent and systematic communication between the DS authorities and the doctoral student community, enabling a more effective articulation of expectations and their proper consideration. At the same time, it would be beneficial for the further development of the doctoral programme if the doctoral student council clearly supported the actions undertaken by the DS authorities to improve the programme's conditions, particularly in terms of strengthening human resources and enhancing facilities.

Strengths:

In some areas, cooperation with the doctoral student council clearly exceeds statutory requirements, which deserves special recognition. This is reflected, *inter alia*, in the participation of doctoral students in the work of DS recruitment committees, which contributes to a more comprehensive assessment of candidates and simultaneously enables representatives of the doctoral community to develop competencies relevant to their future scientific and academic activities. Ensuring of dedicated space for doctoral students to work and integrate, as well as the organisation of initiatives such as the UMCS Doctoral Student Days, also deserves positive evaluation, as these activities foster the exchange of experiences, the building of an academic community, and the strengthening of doctoral student engagement.

Recommendations:

1. Ensuring the autonomy of the doctoral student council by guaranteeing uninterrupted access to its premises, including during evenings and non-teaching days.
2. Supporting the activities of the doctoral student council by enabling it to communicate directly with all individuals enrolled in the DS.
3. Undertaking measures aimed at enhancing the communication and organisational competences of the administrative staff serving the DS.

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:

Characteristics:

The DS's education programme enables the achievement of learning outcomes specified for level 8 of the Polish Qualifications Framework. Due to the relatively small number of participants, classes are conducted in small groups, which promotes the individualisation of the education process and allows the content to be adapted to the needs and expectations of doctoral students. This should be regarded as a significant advantage of the programme. At the same time, however, such an organisation may entail the risk of limited possibilities for conducting classes in the planned, diverse teaching formats (e.g. lectures or workshops), and, in extreme cases, the necessity to cancel certain classes due to an insufficient number of interested doctoral students.

The DS offers doctoral students a diverse educational programme, including both general academic and specialist courses. However, the evaluation indicates that some doctoral students consider certain subjects to be of limited substantive or practical value. Doctoral students highly appreciate courses that support scientific development and foster research skills, regarding them as particularly useful in the course of their education. At the same time, they note that some of these courses are overly task-oriented, which limits their educational potential.

Pursuant to Article 201(5) of the Act of 20 July 2018 on Higher Education and Science (Journal of Laws of 2024, item 1571, as amended), the DS's curriculum may include teaching practice in the form of teaching or participation in teaching. In the evaluated DS, such practices are optional, but the rules governing their implementation are not fully transparent to doctoral students. Representatives of the teaching staff point to the possibility of teaching practice being conducted under a civil contract; however, some doctoral students note that, in practice, this option is not truly available to them. During the meeting of the Evaluation Committee with doctoral students, participants expressed the expectation that the DS should create real conditions for them to gain teaching experience, emphasising that this is crucial for their future efforts to obtain employment in higher education.

Teaching activities at the DS are subject to systematic evaluation by participants. The DS presented evidence that doctoral students' feedback has a tangible impact on the selection of lecturers and the modification of teaching content. At the same time, the Evaluation Committee noted the absence of formal mechanisms enabling doctoral students to comprehensively assess the entire education programme, including its structure, coherence, and adequacy in relation to the intended learning outcomes.

Another shortcoming is the inability to suspend doctoral education in cases other than parenthood (e.g. in the event of illness). This change, proposed by the doctoral student council, is lawful and effectively implemented in other institutions.

The Evaluation Committee also raises concerns regarding the process of preparing the Individual Research Plan (IRP). Firstly, some of the requirements related to the IRP have been regulated outside the DS regulations, even though, pursuant to Article 205(1) of the Act on Higher Education and Science, these matters should be specified exclusively in the DS regulations and agreed with the doctoral student council. These requirements have been presented as formally non-binding guidelines. At the same time, IRPs are subject to review by the scientific councils of institutes. The possibility of consulting IRPs with the broader

academic community constitutes a valuable, quality-enhancing element of the procedure, positively assessed by both doctoral students and supervisors.

The Evaluation Committee also expresses reservations regarding the content of the guidelines for preparing IRPs, which vary significantly between disciplines. In some cases, particularly in the discipline of political science and administration, the guidelines require doctoral students to prepare a considerable number of academic publications. This may lead to a situation in which doctoral students focus on preparing publications that are not directly related to the subject of their doctoral dissertation, which, in turn, may result in delays in its completion and submission. Moreover, the requirements set out in the guidelines do not adequately reflect the actual capacities of doctoral students, including their available financial resources.

The possibility of modifying the IRP is, on the one hand, a solution that increases the flexibility of the education process and allows the plan to be adapted to research progress, which should be positively assessed. On the other hand, however, the lack of a clear definition of the stage at which changes to the IRP are permissible creates the risk that this option may be used strategically – for instance, to adapt the content of the IRP to the requirements of the mid-term evaluation. This, in turn, may weaken the planning function of the IRP and result in its being treated as a reporting document rather than a genuine research management tool.

Strengths:

1. The programme's design demonstrates a clear alignment with level 8 of the Polish Qualifications Framework, particularly in its emphasis on developing the ability to conduct independent research and to design and implement complex research projects.
2. The possibility of consulting the IRP with the broader academic community constitutes a valuable, quality-enhancing practice that is positively assessed by both doctoral students and supervisors.

Recommendation:

1. Considering including teaching practices as an element supporting the achievement of learning outcomes at level 8 of the Polish Qualifications Framework, particularly in the area of competences related to communication, knowledge transfer, and supporting the development of others. It is also advisable to clarify the rules for organising and implementing such practices to ensure transparency and accessibility for all doctoral students. Introducing this solution would allow participants of the DS to gain valuable teaching experience, which is important for their future professional development in the academic environment.
2. Periodically reviewing and modifying the programme so that, while complying with the requirements of level 8 of the Polish Qualifications Framework, it best supports the development of competences necessary for research and academic work, taking into account the needs expressed by doctoral students.
3. Conducting evaluations of the education programme with the participation of doctoral students and DS graduates, and implementing mechanisms ensuring the regular assessment of the programme's quality and effectiveness.
4. Reviewing the current requirements for the content of the IRP and clearly regulating them in the DS regulations, while adapting these requirements to the real capabilities of doctoral students, including the financial resources available for them for conducting research. Differentiating requirements between programmes in individual scientific disciplines (e.g. in the form of appendices to the DS regulations) only to the extent justified by the specific nature of a given discipline, while considering abandoning excessive, disproportionate, or unrelated

requirements.

5. Adapting the procedure for preparing IRPs to the requirements of the Act on Higher Education and Science by indicating that their approval by the scientific councils of institutes and the Director of the DS constitutes only formal acceptance and does not involve interfering with the content of the IRP developed by the doctoral student in consultation with the supervisor.
6. Clarifying the rules for modifying the IRP, particularly by specifying the stage at which changes may be introduced, so as to ensure a balance between flexibility and the reliability of the education process.

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

Characteristics:

The DS has a structured system for verifying learning outcomes corresponding to level 8 of the Polish Qualifications Framework. This system includes, *inter alia*, the completion of courses within the educational programme, evaluation of progress in preparing the doctoral dissertation conducted by the supervisor, and the mid-term evaluation. A significant strength of this system lies in its continuous cycle of improvement, based on clearly defined procedures, internal regulatory documents, and recognised good academic practices.

The system is founded on a multi-stage and diversified assessment methodology that enables comprehensive monitoring of doctoral students' progress and the development of their scientific, research, creative, and social competences. The verification of educational progress is continuous and includes semi-annual reports submitted by doctoral students, as well as an mid-term evaluation of the progress in implementing the tasks defined in the IRP. An important component of the assessment process is also the academic activities of doctoral students, such as academic publications and participation in academic conferences, which make it possible not only to evaluate research advancement but also to verify the development of soft skills, including the ability to present and disseminate research results.

Guidelines for the preparation and assessment of IRPs are developed by individual scientific institutes. This approach makes it possible to account for the specific nature of each scientific discipline and to adapt requirements to various research methodologies. At the same time, however, it carries the risk of considerable variation in expectations towards doctoral students, which may lead to inconsistencies in the criteria used for assessing learning outcomes across the entire doctoral programme. This situation raises concerns about the comparability of doctoral students' achievements across disciplines and the maintenance of uniform standards of educational quality within the DS.

It would be advisable to clarify the procedure for removing doctoral students from the register in optional cases – both in the doctoral programme regulations and in administrative practice – so that a supervisor's request is treated as a premise initiating the assessment of progress in the implementation of the IRP or related to such an assessment, rather than as an independent basis for the removal decision.

The absence of clear guidelines concerning the content and structure of supervisors' opinions results in significant variation in both their form and substantive scope. This diversity hampers the maintenance of consistent assessment standards and limits the extent to which the supervisor's opinion can serve as a reliable tool for confirming the achievement of intended learning outcomes by doctoral students.

Within the DS, a Committee for the Evaluation of Education Quality has been established, which should be viewed positively as an expression of the institution's commitment to systematically monitor and enhance the quality of education. However, the Committee's activities to date have focused primarily on the preparation of the unit for evaluation procedures and ensuring compliance with formal requirements. This indicates the need to broaden the scope of its work to include systematic analysis of educational quality – incorporating the perspectives of doctoral students and supervisors – and to formulate recommendations for improving the study programme.

Strengths:

1. Establishment of the Committee for the Evaluation of Education Quality within the DS.
2. At the beginning of the DS's operation, there was a lack of correlation between the first IRPs and the intended learning outcomes, which represented a significant gap in the educational system. However, it should be emphasised that this issue was identified, and appropriate measures were taken, resulting in a stronger alignment between IRPs and level 8 of the Polish Qualifications Framework learning outcomes in subsequent education cycles.

Recommendations:

1. Considering introducing common standards for developing and evaluating IRPs and including them in the DS regulations. Standardising the basic requirements in this area could contribute to increasing the transparency of expectations towards doctoral students, ensuring the comparability of evaluation criteria, and strengthening the sense of equal treatment among doctoral students in different scientific disciplines.
2. Developing uniform guidelines specifying the content of the supervisor's opinion and indicating the key areas that should be addressed. Standardising the structure and scope of the opinion would enhance its substantive value and ensure the comparability of assessments.
3. Assigning the role of Chair of the Committee for the Evaluation of Education Quality to a person from outside the management of the DS, thereby promoting greater objectivity and independence in assessing the quality of education and ensuring appropriate distance from the DS's ongoing teaching activities.
4. Transforming the Committee for the Evaluation of Education Quality into a more proactive, quality-oriented management instrument. The Committee should not only perform an executive role in meeting external requirements related to evaluation procedures but also actively initiate and implement measures aimed at continuously improving the quality of doctoral education. To this end, assigning the Committee an analytical and strategic function – such as systematically monitoring key quality indicators, identifying areas for improvement, and formulating recommendations to enhance the education process – would be advisable.

- **Qualification of academic teachers and academic staff employed at the doctoral school:**

Characteristics:

The qualifications of academic teachers conducting education within the DS are based on substantive criteria that ensure the comprehensive implementation of the education programme and the achievement of the intended learning outcomes at level 8 of the Polish Qualifications Framework by doctoral students. The DS applies clear and transparent substantive criteria for the selection of teaching staff. Academic teachers conducting classes are selected according to the profile of their research as well as their scientific and teaching achievements.

The verification of qualifications is carried out transparently, and the assessment of achievements over the previous five years ensures that academic teachers possess up-to-date accomplishments in their disciplines, effectively excluding individuals who are less active in research. In this regard, the DS cooperates with other units of Maria Curie-Skłodowska University (UMCS), whose administrations recommend candidates for teaching assignments. As a result, a system has been developed that ensures the participation, among supervisors, of academics with significant achievements in their fields, who conduct scientific projects – primarily national rather than international – and serve on the boards of expert and scientific institutions.

The lecturers demonstrate substantial national and international publication records and have experience in managing research projects funded by external sources such as the National Science Centre, the Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange, the Foundation for Polish Science, the European Commission, and the Polish-German Foundation for Science. The teaching staff also includes members of expert bodies and scientific councils, as well as reviewers and evaluators of grant projects. Furthermore, the DS engages researchers from foreign academic institutions to conduct classes, which constitutes an important element of the internationalisation of the education process. This fosters the exchange of knowledge and good academic practices, broadens doctoral students' scientific and methodological perspectives, and creates opportunities for cooperation in joint research projects and international initiatives.

Classes conducted by academic teachers are largely individualised, with small and variable group sizes depending on recruitment numbers and doctoral students' research profiles. Under such conditions, systematic classroom observation is difficult to conduct. Although the Committee for the Evaluation of Education Quality has prepared a class observation form, it has not been applied in practice due to the specific nature of the education process at the DS. The absence of regular classroom observations somewhat limits the ability to provide teachers with feedback on the quality and adequacy of their teaching methods and approaches, which could otherwise support the process of improving teaching competences. While the lack of systematic classroom observations can be considered justified in the context of the highly individualised education model, it would nevertheless be advisable to explore alternative methods of monitoring teaching quality, such as mentoring observations or the systematic analysis of doctoral students' opinions, to ensure the continuity of the evaluation process and support the ongoing development of teaching staff competences.

In the context of the DS's operation, it is also desirable to further develop a system for enhancing the competences of academic teachers appointed to serve as supervisors or assistant supervisors. The evaluation did not identify existing practices or mechanisms

supporting the development of competences in the formal aspects of doctoral education or in so-called “soft skills” (e.g. communication, mentoring, and conflict resolution). According to the statements of institutional representatives, such developmental initiatives are planned to be introduced in the near future.

Strengths:

1. The internationalisation of the teaching staff constitutes a significant asset. Academic teachers have completed research and teaching internships at foreign institutions, deliver lectures and seminars abroad, participate in academic exchange programmes, and are members of international research teams.
2. The DS actively engages foreign lecturers in the teaching process, for example through participation in the NAWA programme and by organising short guest lectures.
3. The practice of appointing supervisors, including assistant supervisors, also from outside UMCS represents a quality-enhancing mechanism that prioritises academic competence over institutional affiliation.

Recommendations:

1. Developing and implementing mentoring and tutoring programmes identified as key areas for the further development of the DS. Such programmes can significantly contribute to improving the quality of education by providing doctoral students with individual academic and developmental support, strengthening the mentor – student relationship, and creating an environment conducive to the exchange of academic and professional experiences.
2. Introducing structured mechanisms for developing the competences of academic teachers, including both training activities and the systematic enhancement of teaching, organisational, and interpersonal skills.
3. Continuing and further developing workshops for supervisors and academic advisors. They should aim at improving competences in effective cooperation with doctoral students, supporting them in implementing research projects, and developing mentoring and communication skills. Regular training of this kind contributes to improving the quality of academic supervision and strengthening academic culture.
4. Undertaking activities aimed at further adapting the education process to the needs of the international academic environment. Intensifying efforts to increase the attractiveness and positive perception of courses conducted in foreign languages, particularly in English, remains advisable. Despite the gradual expansion of the teaching offer in this area, this issue requires ongoing attention.
5. Intensifying institutional and international cooperation involving both research centres and entities from the industrial sector and public administration. Strengthening these relationships will contribute to better linking the education programme with research and professional practice, enabling doctoral students to gain experience in diverse environments and to develop competences relevant to their future academic and professional careers. Such cooperation may also foster the creation of joint research projects and increase the degree of internationalisation of doctoral studies.
6. Introducing a systematic and transparent class observation system aimed at supporting the continuous development of teaching competences among academic staff and ensuring the high quality of the education process.

- The quality of the admission process:

Characteristics:

The recruitment process of the DS is regulated, transparent, and based on substantive criteria. Its main purpose is to assess candidates' knowledge, level of preparation, and aptitude for education and scientific work. Recruitment is governed by the UMCS Senate Resolution on recruitment, an appendix specifying detailed rules for candidate assessment, and the Rector's Order on admission limits. The procedure is competitive, and its results are publicly available. All legal acts and information concerning recruitment are accessible on the university's website in both Polish and English, with the "Recruitment" tab clearly visible and easily accessible. A tutorial explaining the application procedure has also been prepared for international candidates.

The recruitment process consists of two stages. The first stage focuses primarily on evaluating the candidate's research project proposal, assessed in the context of the discipline in which the candidate intends to prepare their doctoral dissertation. The second stage involves an interview with the recruitment subcommittee responsible for the given discipline. Admission is determined by the total number of points obtained (maximum: 100). The subcommittee comprises the Director or Deputy Director of the DS, two persons holding at least a postdoctoral degree in the discipline, one representative of a related discipline, and a representative of doctoral students. Representatives of doctoral students, appointed by the Doctoral Student Council, actively participate in the work of the Recruitment Committee at every stage. This practice should be assessed particularly positively as an example of good practice, reflecting both transparency and the participatory nature of the recruitment process. Some concerns arise regarding the selection of candidate evaluation criteria. A relatively small proportion of points is awarded for candidates' previous scientific achievements or academic results (5%), while the majority (60%) is assigned for the recruitment interview. The evaluation of prior achievements and academic activity can serve as an important indicator of a candidate's ability to conduct research and to complete tasks related to e.g. the implementation of the IRP. The average grade point resulting from previous studies is not taken into account, in order to limit the risk of bias stemming from differences in educational standards among various institutions and the difficulty of comparing grades obtained abroad. The DS argues that this approach promotes equal opportunities for candidates from smaller academic centres. However, it is worth considering whether placing such a strong emphasis on the research project assessment may, in practice, have the opposite effect, deepening the inequalities that the adopted approach was intended to reduce.

Recruitment to the DS is conducted as a competitive process involving a joint procedure for all disciplines in which education is offered. Although this solution may potentially entail a risk of limited comparability between applications submitted by candidates from different scientific disciplines, the DS takes appropriate measures to minimise this risk.

The rules governing the competition are clear, transparent, and properly communicated. Participation in the competition requires submission of an application containing, among other materials, a research project proposal and documentation confirming the candidate's previous scientific activity. Candidates are not required to indicate a prospective supervisor at the recruitment stage, which undoubtedly facilitates participation, particularly for individuals who are not current or former students of UMCS. The DS's website also publishes suggested research areas and potential supervisors; however, this list is advisory and non-binding.

Candidates may submit research proposals on topics not included in the published list. Documentation from the recruitment process shows that questions asked during interviews are generally of a highly general nature. However, it cannot be excluded that candidates' competences to undertake doctoral education are indeed verified during the interview, although this is not sufficiently reflected in the official documentation of the procedure. The DS declares openness to the needs of persons with disabilities. In this respect, the recruitment resolution provides for the possibility of changing the form of the interview or allowing the participation of a support person for a candidate with a disability.

Strengths:

1. The introduction in 2024 of the function of a representative from a related discipline, alongside the doctoral student representative, serves as an additional safeguard ensuring that the recruitment process remains substantive, fair, and non-discriminatory.
2. Candidates with disabilities are provided with appropriate support measures, including access to a sign language interpreter, an assistant, and the possibility of modifying the form of the interview.

Recommendations:

1. Implementing instruments aimed at limiting the excessive expansion of more popular disciplines in the DS recruitment process. Considering introducing a parity mechanism based on an algorithm that takes into account the university's development strategy and research policy. Such a solution would allow for a more balanced allocation of places across individual disciplines, promoting the harmonious development of the university's research potential and ensuring the representativeness of various scientific areas.
2. Considering modifying the scoring rules applied in the recruitment process, particularly by increasing the weight assigned to the assessment of candidates' previous scientific achievements while reducing the importance of the recruitment interview. Such a measure could contribute to increasing the objectivity of the assessment process, better reflecting the candidates' actual academic accomplishments, and limiting the influence of subjective factors on the final outcome of the procedure.
3. Verifying the rules for conducting recruitment interviews and documenting their course. Introducing more detailed procedures, including standardising assessment criteria, ensuring transparency in the process, and establishing clear rules for preparing interview reports, could contribute to increasing the transparency and comparability of candidate assessments, thereby strengthening the credibility of the entire recruitment process.

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

Characteristics:

Academic supervision in the DS is provided throughout the entire period of study. Doctoral students prepare their dissertations in cooperation with their supervisor, supervisors, or a supervisor and assistant supervisor. The appointment or change of supervisor is made by the Scientific Councils of the respective institutes. Doctoral students play an active role in this process by proposing a candidate for a supervisor.

The procedure for selecting a supervisor does not raise any concerns. The list of available supervisors, along with proposed research topics, is published on the DS's website and is regularly updated for all scientific disciplines represented at the DS. During the recruitment process, candidates may contact potential supervisors to discuss the proposed dissertation topic and the terms of cooperation. A supervisor may oversee a maximum of three doctoral students enrolled at the DS, which appears to be a reasonable limit; in practice, this threshold is rarely reached.

The DS did not provide convincing evidence of a systematic method for monitoring the quality of doctoral supervision throughout the education period, indicating instead that the mid-term evaluation plays a key role in this regard. The DS reported that it had conducted a single analysis of supervision quality to date, focusing on individuals who had completed their education at the DS. This measure should be considered insufficient. Regular and systematic monitoring of the quality of cooperation between doctoral students and supervisors is essential both to ensure a high standard of academic supervision and to support supervisors in developing competences that facilitate effective mentoring and guidance in the research and teaching process.

The number of teaching hours allocated for doctoral supervision does not differ significantly from standards adopted in other doctoral schools and ensures a basic level of supervisor support. However, it should be noted that these hours apply only to the main supervisor, while the role of the assistant supervisor remains less clearly defined. This may lead to a perception of unequal treatment among supervisors and an unclear division of responsibilities within the research process.

The role of the assistant supervisor is not clearly defined, making it difficult to assess its actual scope of tasks. The DS should consider clarifying this role by explicitly outlining the range of responsibilities, competences, and forms of cooperation with both the doctoral student and the main supervisor. Such clarification would help ensure consistency within the supervisory team and provide effective substantive support in the preparation of doctoral dissertations.

The DS supports the professional development of academic staff, particularly in their supervisory roles. During the evaluation period, the DS organised, among other initiatives, two editions of international interdisciplinary workshops for supervisors and an international conference devoted to sharing experiences in supervision. These valuable initiatives should be continued as part of efforts to strengthen the professional development of supervisors.

The DS has not yet established formal procedures for resolving conflicts between doctoral students and their supervisors. Such matters currently fall within the competence of the Director of the DS, who oversees the organisation of the education process. The absence of clearly defined procedures in this area hinders a timely and transparent response to potential conflicts, may discourage doctoral students from reporting problems for fear of repercussions,

and can negatively affect trust in the institution and the quality of the educational process. Although few serious conflicts have been reported, it would be advisable to develop appropriate procedures – potentially in cooperation with other UMCS doctoral schools and the university administration.

According to the DS's explanations, general mediation and support mechanisms are available at the university level. However, doctoral students do not perceive them as effective tools for resolving conflicts with supervisors. Existing instruments, such as the university's anti-mobbing procedure, are not tailored to the specific nature of doctoral education or the unique academic relationship between doctoral students and supervisors. During the visit, it was noted that the current mechanism for resolving such disputes primarily involves changing the supervisor – a measure that should be considered a last resort. The absence of a separate, clearly defined mediation or intervention procedure discourages doctoral students from reporting problems, which may lead to their escalation and undermine the quality of supervisory cooperation.

Doctoral students generally do not experience significant difficulties in accessing research infrastructure, including library resources, scientific databases, and specialised software. However, they point to the limited availability of workspaces, which largely depends on the space management policies of individual institutes and decisions made by supervisors. This issue has also been recognised by the DS's administration.

The level of involvement of distinguished external specialists in supporting doctoral students' research should be assessed as good. The DS regularly invites visiting professors affiliated with foreign academic institutions, using national and European academic exchange programmes for this purpose. Cooperation with renowned external scholars represents a significant added value, enabling doctoral students to develop their research skills, broaden their academic perspectives, and establish international contacts. It is also worth emphasising that doctoral students have access to numerous training initiatives on research methods and techniques, including those involving modern technologies, which further enhance their research competences.

Strengths:

1. The DS allows scholars not employed at UMCS to perform supervisory duties. This solution promotes the internationalisation of the education process, enables doctoral students to collaborate with distinguished specialists from outside their home institution, and strengthens the interdisciplinary character of the research conducted.
2. The allocation of annual financial support in the amount of PLN 3,000 per doctoral student should be assessed positively. These funds constitute an important instrument supporting the research independence of doctoral students and allow for the pursuit of scientific objectives in a more flexible manner, adapted to the specific needs of individual projects.
3. The DS regulations provide comprehensive solutions to support doctoral students with disabilities, including the possibility of receiving assistance from support staff and adapting examination formats and schedules to individual needs. Moreover, the support system extends to doctoral students who are parents, granting them the possibility of extending the deadline for submitting their doctoral dissertation and suspending their studies for a period corresponding to maternity or paternity leave. These solutions reflect the DS's strong commitment to social responsibility and its dedication to ensuring equal opportunities in access to education and scientific development.

Recommendations:

1. Developing and implementing a dedicated and transparent procedure for resolving conflicts between doctoral students and their supervisors within the DS. This procedure should clearly define the stages of the process, the competences and responsibilities of the relevant bodies, and the available forms of support and mediation. Introducing such a mechanism would contribute to increasing doctoral students' sense of security, strengthening trust in institutional support structures, and ensuring an effective and transparent response to challenges arising in supervisor - student relationships.
2. Clarifying the role of the assistant supervisor in the doctoral education system and considering introducing an obligation for them to provide an opinion on the IRP. Strengthening the role of the assistant supervisor would enhance the effectiveness of academic supervision and provide an additional level of substantive support for doctoral students. It would also be advisable to clarify the rules of cooperation and task distribution between the main and assistant supervisors to ensure that they accurately reflect the contribution of both parties and maintain a balance in recognising their involvement.
3. Introducing a system for the ongoing assessment of supervision quality, including regularly collecting doctoral students' feedback and analysing the effectiveness of cooperation with supervisors. Such a system should enable the early identification of potential difficulties in supervisory relationships and provide mechanisms for timely intervention and support.
- 4) Taking measures aimed at improving the quality of administrative services for doctoral students, particularly by increasing the number of DS administrative staff and extending the working hours of the Secretary Office.

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

Characteristics:

The mid-term evaluation procedure at the DS has been developed in accordance with the provisions of the Act on Higher Education and Science and the university's internal regulations. It clearly defines the particular stages of the procedure, the required documentation, and the operating procedures of the committee, including the doctoral student's presentation of research progress. However, it is noticeable that some of the rules and assessment criteria are dispersed – some are included in the DS regulations, while others are contained in separate procedures and annexes. The documents stipulate the doctoral student's obligation to present their research progress but do not explicitly mention an interview with the committee, which, according to the minutes analysed, constitutes an established element of mid-term evaluation practice.

In accordance with statutory requirements, the mid-term evaluation in doctoral studies is carried out halfway through the period of study. The mid-term evaluation committee is appointed in line with legal regulations. The assessment is conducted on the basis of the doctoral student's self-assessment report, additional submitted materials, and the supervisor's opinion. The doctoral student has the opportunity to present the current status of the IRP to the mid-term evaluation committee. The evaluation process employs a points-based system, under which each committee member assigns a numerical score to the doctoral student, and the final result is calculated as an average of these scores. A minimum of 70 points is required to obtain a positive mid-term evaluation result. In the history of the DS, only two doctoral students have been removed from the register due to a negative outcome of the mid-term evaluation. The DS regulations correctly define the appeal procedure, allowing for the re-conducting of the evaluation if the doctoral student submits a request for reconsideration of the case.

The scoring criteria used in the mid-term evaluation procedure do not fully correspond to the scope of assessment specified in statutory provisions. According to the detailed rules currently in force at the DS, a doctoral student may obtain a maximum of 100 points, of which only 60 points are allocated for the timely and proper implementation of the IRP. This arrangement raises concerns, as the number of points that can be awarded for fully meeting the IRP requirements is insufficient to achieve a positive overall result. This issue has previously been raised by the Doctoral Student Council, which proposed modifications to the scoring structure. Furthermore, this method of assessment limits the ability to account for justified delays in the implementation of the IRP that arise through no fault of the doctoral student, particularly given that the DS does not provide mechanisms allowing for the suspension of education, for instance, in cases of long-term illness, the need to care for a family member, or engagement in other research projects not directly related to the IRP. The remaining points are awarded for additional activities such as scientific publications, participation in conferences, and applications for research grants. This scoring model may lead to an excessive emphasis on publishing activity at the expense of achieving the core objectives of the IRP.

The level of transparency in the DS's mid-term evaluation process is limited, as only the final result is published, however without a justification. This practice is inconsistent with Article 202(3) of the Act on Higher Education and Science, which stipulates that both the outcome of the evaluation and its justification must be made public. Ensuring full transparency in this

process would constitute an important step towards reinforcing accountability in doctoral education and strengthening trust in the assessment procedures applied.

The mid-term evaluation procedure is conducted exclusively in the presence of the committee members and the doctoral student under evaluation, without the participation of doctoral student representatives as observers. Although this practice complies with the applicable formal requirements, it limits the transparency of the process and the possibility of broader oversight. Allowing observers representing the doctoral student community to attend could enhance both transparency and trust in the procedures employed.

Strengths:

1. The practice of including two experts from outside UMCS in the mid-term evaluation committee significantly strengthens the independence, reliability, and objectivity of the evaluation process, thereby enhancing its credibility and alignment with the principles of good academic practice.
2. The introduction of an appeal procedure represents an important step in the systematic improvement of the mid-term evaluation process, and this practice should be maintained and further developed.
3. The organisation of meetings with doctoral students prior to the mid-term evaluation constitutes a good practice that enhances the transparency of the process, helps doctoral students prepare for the evaluation, and contributes to reducing stress associated with it. This initiative should be continued on a regular basis, with appropriate documentation of these meetings and the systematic use of the conclusions drawn from them to further improve the mid-term evaluation procedure.

Recommendations:

1. Strengthening the clarity and transparency of the mid-term evaluation process by clarifying the provisions of the Regulations of the DS. In particular, including in the regulations the key elements of the evaluation procedure, such as the scope and criteria of assessment, the stages of the process, the method of appointing the committee, relevant deadlines, and the procedure for informing doctoral students about the results. The aim of these changes is ensuring that the mid-term evaluation process remains clear, comparable, and comprehensible to all participants, and thus compliant with the principles of fairness and transparency applicable in higher education.
2. Implementing the practice of publishing mid-term evaluation results together with justifications, in a manner ensuring the protection of personal data while allowing participants and the academic community to understand how the assessment criteria are applied. This measure would contribute to increasing the transparency and credibility of the evaluation procedure and ensuring its compliance with Article 202(3) of the Act on Higher Education and Science.
3. Introducing the possibility for a representative of doctoral students to participate as an observer in meetings of the mid-term evaluation committee. The presence of such a representative, acting without voting rights, could strengthen the sense of impartiality, transparency, and trust in the evaluation process, while promoting a better understanding of its procedures among doctoral students.
4. Standardising the rules for constructing the IRP and the criteria for mid-term evaluation, thereby creating a coherent system for verifying doctoral student progress. Ensuring that the mid-term evaluation directly relates to the implementation of the IRP.

- **Internationalisation:**

Characteristics:

Internationalisation is one of the core values of the DS, alongside openness, social responsibility, and scientific excellence. It constitutes a strategic priority in the DS's development, with its main objectives focusing on promoting internationalisation in teaching and enhancing the scientific, social, and pedagogical competences of doctoral students. In recent years, there has been a steady increase in interest in DS recruitment among foreign candidates. The number of international applicants has risen significantly – from 12 in 2019 to 44 in 2024. Currently, 17 of the 89 doctoral students enrolled at the DS are foreign nationals. Since 2019, 29 out of 127 doctoral students have come from abroad, and 16 are preparing their dissertations in English, confirming the ongoing internationalisation of the education process. The consistent growth in interest from foreign candidates reflects the DS's positive reputation within the international community and the growing global recognition of the university.

Foreign doctoral students highly appreciate the commitment of the DS authorities and administration, particularly in terms of organisational and administrative support. However, some challenges remain in integrating international doctoral students into the local academic and social environment – both within the university and the city. The main issues identified include the limited availability of Polish language courses for foreigners and the insufficient inclusiveness of the Doctoral Student Council towards non-Polish members. The resulting lack of a strong sense of belonging to the local academic community is a concern that, given the growing number of international doctoral students, warrants increased attention from both the DS leadership and the university as a whole. Strengthening integration efforts, as well as cultural and linguistic initiatives, could significantly enhance the doctoral experience and further reinforce the university's international reputation. It would also be advisable to enable doctoral students who do not speak Polish to attend Polish as a foreign language classes and to participate, alongside students, in other language courses relevant to their academic work. The DS maintains a comprehensive English-language version of its website, which provides key information on all aspects of its operation – from admission procedures and the course of study to the mid-term evaluation process and graduation requirements. The content is clearly structured and accessible, and an instructional guide for international candidates explaining the application process has been developed.

The DS also pursues the ongoing internationalisation of its academic staff and research environment. Faculty members undertake research and teaching internships at prestigious foreign institutions, deliver lectures and seminars abroad, participate in teaching exchange programmes, and collaborate within international research teams. These efforts have resulted in numerous joint publications with international partners. The DS actively engages lecturers from outside UMCS, including visiting professors from the European Union, the United States, Taiwan, and South Korea, through programmes such as NAWA STER. In 2023, the DS organised an international summer school entitled "Artificial Intelligence: From Ideas to Application", financed by NAWA, which demonstrates the dynamic development of the DS's global activities.

The DS curriculum, implemented across seven scientific disciplines, is bilingual and delivered in both Polish and English. This solution is a key component of the internationalisation process, facilitating the effective recruitment of foreign candidates. In mixed groups

composed of Polish and international doctoral students, courses are conducted in English. Moreover, some compulsory courses common to all doctoral students are taught exclusively in English, such as Academic Writing. A substantial part of the elective curriculum is also delivered by visiting lecturers from abroad, further strengthening the international dimension of the programme.

A major achievement of the DS is the acquisition of external funding to support international mobility and promote a culture of scientific exchange. Doctoral students have opportunities to undertake research internships in Poland and abroad under agreements between UMCS and partner universities, as well as within programmes such as NAWA and Erasmus+. Through funding obtained from the NAWA STER programme, six doctoral students completed internships at prestigious international research centres in Taiwan, Norway, Switzerland, and Spain. Twelve additional internships are planned in the near future, reflecting the growing mobility and engagement of doctoral students. The DS also provides financial support for participation in international conferences. UMCS has been a member of the European ATHENA Alliance since 2022; however, this has not yet translated into a significant increase in the internationalisation of the doctoral programme during the evaluation period.

In the preparation of the dissertation process, the DS allows for the appointment of supervisors or assistant supervisors from abroad – although only one such case has been recorded to date. Foreign experts (three so far) have also participated in the work of mid-term evaluation committees, and an international mentoring programme has been introduced, currently involving two doctoral students.

One weakness identified is the lack of transparency in allocating doctoral students to courses conducted in foreign languages. It is therefore recommended that clear and transparent allocation criteria be developed, or that doctoral students be given the option to choose the language of instruction themselves. Another area requiring further development is expanding the English-language course offer across all disciplines represented at the DS.

Despite consistent efforts to promote internationalisation, several challenges persist. The language barrier remains one of the main obstacles, as limited knowledge of Polish hinders some foreign doctoral students from fully participating in the academic and social life of the university. Additional difficulties arise at both the recruitment and study stages due to complex visa procedures, which can delay the commencement or continuation of studies. There are also some concerns regarding the perception of classes conducted in English: although most doctoral students possess adequate English proficiency, such classes are not always viewed as fully meeting expectations in terms of pedagogical and communicative quality.

Strengths:

1. A bilingual study programme (in Polish and English) offered across seven academic disciplines, facilitating the effective recruitment of candidates from abroad.
2. Active engagement of the DS in the internationalisation of both staff and doctoral students through cooperation with foreign universities, participation in research internships, organisation of summer schools, and involvement in international conferences

Recommendations:

1. Strengthening administrative support for doctoral students from abroad. Further support is needed in the areas of visa, registration and insurance procedures.
2. Developing and systematically expanding the offer of Polish language courses for doctoral students from abroad. This would facilitate the daily functioning of foreigners, communication

with teaching staff and administration, and would also promote their better integration into the academic and local community.

3. Considering introducing the possibility of free participation for foreign doctoral students in Polish as a foreign language courses and language classes conducted by the university.
4. Intensifying efforts to ensure that classes conducted in foreign languages are regarded positively by all doctoral students. In particular, it is advisable to monitor the quality of teaching in this area, adapt teaching methods to the varying levels of language proficiency of participants, and systematically collect feedback from doctoral students on the course of classes.
5. Strengthening the presence of foreign doctoral students in the daily activities of the DS and in decision-making bodies representing the doctoral student community.
6. Strengthening the process of integrating foreign doctoral students into the Polish scientific community by developing initiatives that promote cooperation and exchange of experiences between doctoral students from different countries. In particular, it is worth supporting joint research projects, scientific seminars, integration events and mentoring carried out by Polish academic staff and doctoral students.
7. Enhancing the visibility of the DS within the international academic community by developing and disseminating promotional materials targeted at prospective foreign candidates. Particular emphasis should be placed on creating English-language content highlighting the achievements and experiences of the doctoral students and DS's alumni (e.g. through the "Meet our Ph.D. Students" format) and on ensuring their presence on the University's official website and social media platforms.
8. Maximising the potential of the European university alliance ATHENA structures by strengthening their role in deepening the internationalisation of the DS.

- The effectiveness of the doctoral education:

Characteristics:

According to the data presented by the DS, the effectiveness of education remains at a good level – nearly half of the doctoral students who completed their education (43% in total and 48% among those completing it during the evaluation period) obtained the doctoral degree. All graduates applied for the award of the degree, and none of them has been refused so far. This indicates both an appropriate selection of candidates to the DS and a high quality of education, as well as the effectiveness of supervisory support.

The Evaluation Committee noted a relatively high percentage of students who, among those admitted in 2019, did not complete their education. However, the DS provided convincing explanations regarding the reasons for this situation. Nevertheless, the DS should implement adequate mechanisms for verifying progress and providing support to those experiencing difficulties during their studies. It would also be advisable to consider measures aimed at reducing the workload of doctoral students, for example by lowering the publication requirements imposed in certain disciplines, in order to give them a greater chance of submitting their doctoral dissertation on time.

The key scientific achievements of doctoral students preparing their dissertations in various disciplines, as presented by the DS in the self-evaluation report, confirm the high quality of the research conducted and its significant contribution to the development of individual academic fields. Doctoral students actively participate in research projects, both national and international, and publish the results of their work in reputable academic publishers and high-ranking journals, including those indexed in international databases. Their academic achievements also include presentations at prestigious conferences, participation in research grants, and cooperation with research institutions in Poland and abroad, which demonstrates their growing academic activity and the effectiveness of the DS system in developing research competencies.

The effectiveness of education remains, however, an area requiring further improvement at the DS. The self-evaluation report indicates that the UMCS operates an Internal Quality Assurance System, which enables continuous monitoring of the educational process and doctoral student services, their analysis, planning, and the implementation of corrective and improvement measures. The Evaluation Committee found, however, that the survey-based assessment of cooperation between doctoral students and supervisors has so far been conducted only once – among those completing their education. It would therefore be advisable to introduce regular satisfaction surveys among doctoral students during their studies, which would allow for the ongoing assessment of the quality of supervisory support and the adequacy of assistance provided in the preparation of doctoral dissertations. The systematic monitoring of the quality of classes at the DS, carried out through annual evaluation surveys, should be assessed positively.

The DS indicated that it is developing a graduate career monitoring system and maintaining contact with graduates, using their experience in promotional activities. However, no specific methods for analysing and practically applying the results of this monitoring were presented, which also constitutes an area requiring further development.

Strengths:

1. The high level of scientific activity demonstrated by doctoral students, evidenced by their

participation in national and international research projects, publications in renowned academic journals, and presentations at prestigious conferences, serves as strong confirmation of the effectiveness of the DS education system in developing research competencies.

Recommendations:

1. Strengthening and developing mechanisms to support the improvement of education effectiveness, including the early identification of doctoral students' difficulties, providing them with adequate support and adjusting requirements – especially publication requirements – to the real possibilities of conducting research.
2. Developing and systematically strengthening the system for monitoring the careers of DS graduates and maintaining regular contact with them. Creating a permanent alumni network can bring measurable benefits, especially in the area of promoting DS, building its image in the scientific and professional community, and improving the educational offer based on the professional experience of graduates.

V. FINAL OPINION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Doctoral School of Social Sciences of the UMCS met all the criteria specified in the evaluation process, each of which was assessed positively by the Evaluation Committee. Detailed information on the assessment of individual criteria is presented in the relevant sections of the preliminary evaluation report.

The Evaluation Committee concluded that the identified deficiencies and shortcomings do not interfere with the proper functioning of the DS. It also formulated a set of recommendations and suggestions aimed at further improving the quality of the educational process at the School. The Committee unanimously determined that the doctoral education process at the DS merits a positive evaluation. It is characterised by a coherent organisational structure, a high level of academic expertise, and strong commitment on the part of the teaching and research staff, all of which contribute to the effective implementation of research projects and the comprehensive development of early-career researchers.

In the opinion of the Evaluation Committee, the next evaluation of the DS should be carried out in six years, in accordance with Article 259(2) of the Act of 20 July 2018 on Higher Education and Science (Journal of Laws of 2024, item 1571, as amended).

VI. ASSESSMENT AND REASON

Final assessment positive

Reason:

The Evaluation Committee recommends a positive assessment of the Doctoral School of Social Sciences at Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin. The educational process implemented by the School enables doctoral students to achieve the intended learning outcomes, in line with the requirements of Level 8 of the Polish Qualifications Framework. The high level of competence of the academic staff, combined with a well-thought-out, coherent, and properly designed education programme, translates into the very good quality and effectiveness of the overall teaching process.

In its final report, the Evaluation Committee formulated recommendations whose implementation should contribute to strengthening the system for monitoring doctoral students' learning outcomes, streamlining the mid-term evaluation process, and improving communication with the UMCS Doctoral Student Council. These recommendations are developmental in nature and are intended to further enhance the activities of the Doctoral School and support the development of early-career researchers. The identification of areas requiring further improvement does not affect the unequivocally positive assessment of the Doctoral School, which provides doctoral education at a very good substantive and organisational level.

In view of the above, the Evaluation Committee recommends that the next evaluation be conducted in six years, in accordance with Article 259(2) of the Act of 20 July 2018 on Higher Education and Science (Journal of Laws of 2024, item 1571, as amended).

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