
KEN

2023-2027

DOCTORAL SCHOOL

EDUCATION QUALITY REPORT

Szkoła Doktorska

Uniwersytet SWPS



Name and seat of the doctoral school

Szkoła Doktorska

Evaluation period

10/1/19–12/18/24

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

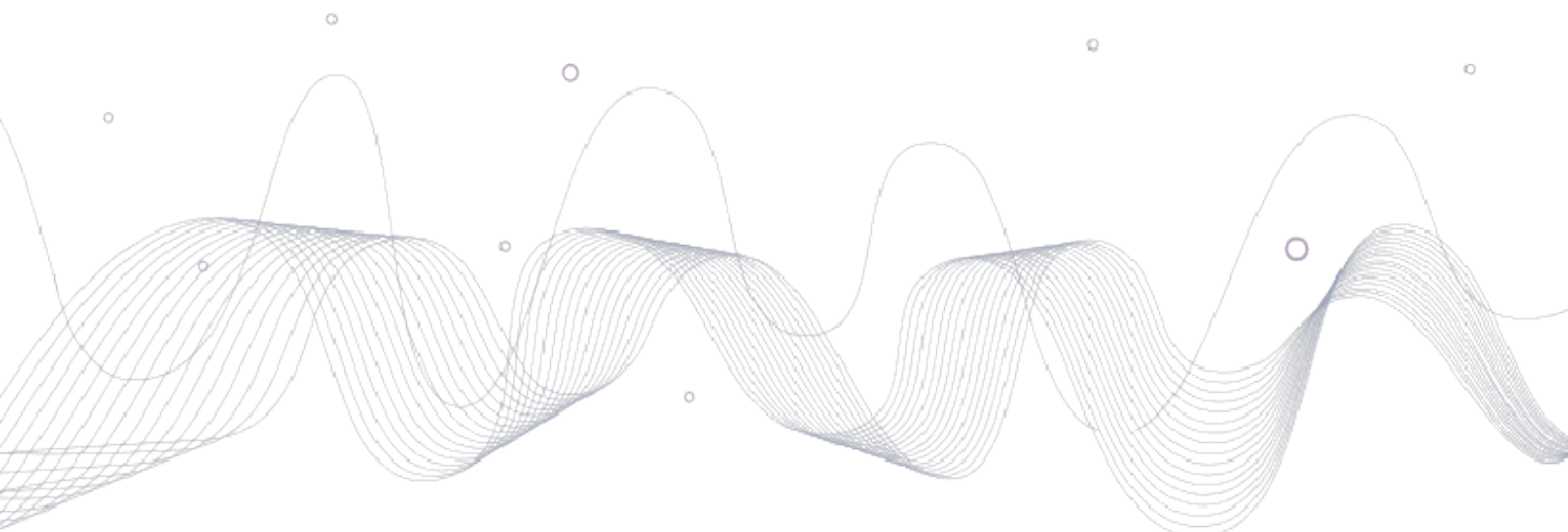
Uniwersytet SWPS

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

-

Date of report

3/12/25



Composition of the evaluation team:

Chairman:

Dariusz Kupisz

Secretary:

Dominika Bugno-Narecka

Team members:

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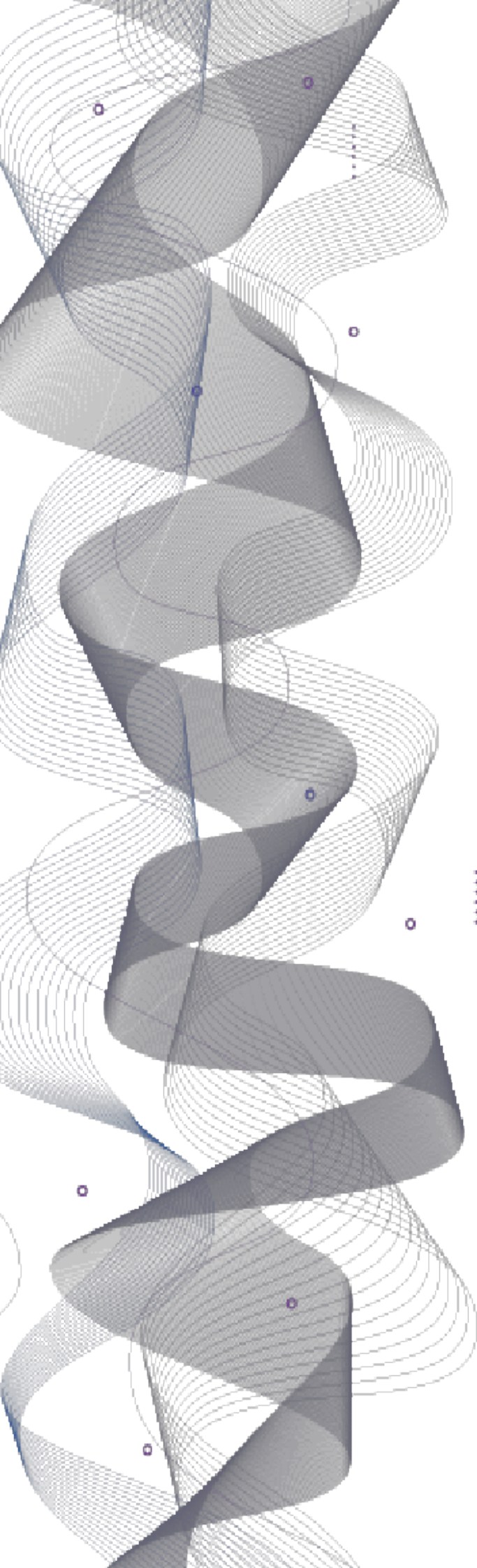


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I. GENERAL INFORMATION ON THE DOCTORAL SCHOOL

Name of doctoral school	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)	-
Domains of study	Humanities (from: 01-01-2018) Social sciences (from: 01-01-2018) The arts (from: 01-01-2018)
Discipline(s) of science or art in which training is provided	literary studies (from: 01-01-2018) culture and religion studies (from: 01-01-2018) political and administrative sciences (from: 01-01-2018) sociology (from: 01-01-2018) psychology (from: 01-01-2018) fine arts and art conservation (from: 01-01-2018)
Name/scope of the education programme	Study Program at the Doctoral School of Social Sciences and Humanities Study Program at the Doctoral School of the SWPS University Study Program at the Doctoral School of the SWPS University change
Number of instructors	84
Number of doctoral students undergoing training at the doctoral school (as of 3/10/25)	96
Number of supervisors in terms of guidance in preparing doctoral dissertations (as of 3/10/25)	44
Number of auxiliary supervisors in terms of guidance in preparing doctoral dissertations (as of 3/10/25)	15

II. INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION AND ITS COURSE

The inspection of the Doctoral School of SWPS University took place on April 10, 2025, and was based on the schedule submitted in advance to its Director. The first item on the agenda was a meeting with the authorities of the Doctoral School and the SWPS University; followed by a meeting with the team that prepared the Self-Assessment Report (including members of the Doctoral School Council), and a meeting with supervisors and other teachers at the Doctoral School. Then, the Evaluation Committee had the opportunity to review documentation, including Individual Research Plans and mid-term evaluations. The final point of the inspection was a meeting with the representatives of the Doctoral Student Government Council and the doctoral students themselves. Doctoral School provided the Evaluation Committee with adequate working conditions. The aforementioned meetings made it possible to obtain additional information regarding student training. The Evaluation Committee listened to the reports on the Doctoral School's mission and its place in the University structure. In the latter, doctoral students are constantly present through their work in Research Centers within the Institutes and teaching practice. At the same time, there is an ongoing cooperation among the Research Centers, which enables doctoral students to deepen their knowledge. What is also noteworthy is the support offered to employees (including PhD supervisors) and doctoral students, the examples of which include numerous training courses, grant application, or reward system. The meeting with doctoral students showed that many of them graduated from universities other than SWPS University. They chose the Doctoral School of SWPS University because of its position and good contact with potential supervisors. The doctoral students emphasized the fact that their Government Council has an important place in the structure of the University and participates in monthly meetings with the Doctoral School Council.

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

All doctoral students elect the Doctoral Student Government Council at the beginning of each academic year. The Council consists of doctoral students from all disciplines. The Doctoral Student Government Council is an advisory body which the Director of the Doctoral School and the Doctoral School Council consult in order to ensure the protection of students' interests. Representatives of doctoral students are members of the Doctoral School Council and the Scientific Councils of the Institutes which provide doctoral training. The Doctoral Student Government is responsible for the organisation of the Doctoral Research Session, which provides doctoral students with valuable experience and strengthens their agency and capacity, integrating them with the general community of the SWPS University. Cooperation with the Doctoral Student Government takes the form of monthly meetings throughout the academic year. Doctoral students participate in the process of changing documents, rules, regulations, as well as the course of important events (such as the mid-term evaluation or the organization of the Doctoral Research Session). The detailed tasks of the Doctoral Student Government Council, i.e. expressing opinions and consulting, are contained in the Regulations of the Doctoral Student Government. Comments obtained from doctoral students are taken into account in the process of amending internal regulations.

It can be said that the cooperation of the Doctoral School with the Doctoral Student Government Council is exemplary.

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:**

The curriculum, as well as the content of Individual Research Plans, are aligned with the learning outcomes for qualifications at level 8 of the Polish Qualifications Framework (PQF). The curriculum is divided into five thematic blocks. Almost all classes and scientific activities within the overall curriculum of the Doctoral School are conducted in English, which provides a suitable opportunity for the doctoral students' development and supports the achievement of nearly all learning outcomes specified by PQF level 8.

The Doctoral School puts significant emphasis on the quality of Individual Research Plans (IRPs). They perform the central role in planning and monitoring a doctoral student's progress. The analysis of the IRP content shows that they are well-structured and properly written documents, containing all the necessary information about the doctoral thesis. The implementation of IRPs is monitored by means of annual reports written by doctoral students. Corrective measures are taken in the event of deviations from the plan. Both the IRPs and the annual reports require the acceptance of the Director of the Doctoral School.

While the curricula and IRPs are of high standard, the presented syllabuses/course sheets need to be improved. Missing information should be completed. Methods of learning outcomes verification are not the same as assessment criteria (e.g., mere participation in classes does not verify achievement of learning outcomes and can only be a condition for passing). Teaching methods should be separated from class contents (course syllabus), while learning outcomes should be tailored to the subject (e.g. how does the class called "Writing Grant proposals" teach academic teaching?) and use one precise and specific verb (e.g., 'inspires' instead of 'can inspire', 'analyses' instead of 'knows how to analyse').

- **The method of assessing the learning outcomes for qualifications at level 8 of the PQF:**
The method of verifying learning outcomes raises no concerns both from a formal-legal standpoint and in terms of practical implementation. According to the Self-Assessment Report, as well as the assurances from the Doctoral School authorities and the doctoral students themselves, the verification of learning outcomes for qualifications at level 8 of the Polish Qualifications Framework (PQF) very often takes place outside the traditional classes, namely during conferences, seminars, and summer schools, and through publications or grant applications. Such verification is possible due to engaging doctoral students in research activities carried out as part of their practice at SWPS Research Centers or through the organization of the Doctoral Research Session, during which doctoral students present (in English) their research progress.
Doctoral students also frequently have the opportunity to present the (partial or complete) results of their research in the form of presentations or posters at scientific conferences. On completion of these activities, they receive confirmation of having achieved learning outcomes. Formally, the process is based on appropriate documents being submitted by the doctoral student to the Doctoral School.
Another important aspect is the verification of doctoral students' teaching skills, which takes place through mandatory class observation. In order to improve doctoral students' teaching skills at the academic level, we suggest an increase from 10 to 15 hours of academic teaching practice. This will enable doctoral students to conduct a more coherent course in the selected subject.
According to the assurances of the Director of the Doctoral School and the doctoral students, the methods of verifying learning outcomes at PQF level 8 are continually improved and result from consultations with course instructors and regular monthly meetings of the Doctoral School Council, which includes representatives of all disciplines that offer doctoral education (including Institute Directors), as well as a representative of the Doctoral Student Government Council.

- **Qualification of academic teachers and academic staff employed at the doctoral school:**
Doctoral School makes every possible effort to ensure that academic teachers involved in educational activities and broadly understood academic supervision represent the highest academic standards. The analysis of their scientific and teaching achievements leaves no doubt that they are individuals with very strong—often outstanding—scientific accomplishments and solid teaching experience. The Doctoral School has established clear and transparent criteria for selecting staff involved in training. Academic teachers conducting classes at the Doctoral School are chosen according to their research profile. They are required to have carried out an international grant in the previous five years, which effectively excludes less research-active individuals. The responsibility for selecting teaching staff lies with the Director of the Doctoral School, though the selection is made collectively in collaboration with other members of the Doctoral School Council.
Apart from research and teaching staff, selected classes at the Doctoral School are co-taught by individuals from other university units, including the Knowledge Transfer Center and the Research Support Office, where the former puts research to business use and the latter assists with obtaining external grants and project administration. Teaching activities that involve non-academic staff are carried out together with a scientific and didactic worker. Furthermore, the Doctoral School uses not only the staff employed by the SWPS University, but often engages outstanding specialists from the outside. Regular cooperation with leading scientists is certainly beneficial for doctoral students.
In this context, it is worth adding that doctoral students may also participate in numerous trainings on new teaching methods, including the use of modern technologies. The Doctoral School places significant emphasis on developing doctoral students' teaching competences and, more broadly, their ability to work with students. Finally, it is worth highlighting that classes of interest to the doctoral students are conducted regardless of the number of participants. This demonstrates that the Doctoral School is aware of the unique educational needs of doctoral students and is prepared to meet them regardless of the cost.
The Doctoral School has implemented a clear peer-mentoring system and introduced the Representative for mediation and mentoring, whose activities are appreciated by both the staff and the doctoral students. The latter praise the support from the University and the Doctoral School's administration. The Doctoral School's documentation does not indicate the existence of significant conflicts in this area. The few cases of supervisor change during the course of study were due to reasons beyond control.

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

The recruitment process at the Doctoral School is transparent but complex, as it involves several paths that depend on the source of funding (external grant, University funds, implementation doctorate). Thus, there are differences in the procedure, depending on the source of funding the candidate's scientific activity. In the evaluated period, 96 candidates were accepted, with a similar ratio of scholarships from university funds to external funds (58% to 42%). Information concerning the recruitment process (how many stages it consists of, what requirements a candidate must meet, where to start the application, what documents are required, when to expect the results, etc.) is clear and available online in Polish and English. The rules of the recruitment process are known to the candidates long before the actual recruitment begins. The University publishes the profiles of potential PhD supervisors on the website of the Doctoral School.

The Senate adopted relevant resolutions on recruitment in the subsequent years. Changes in the documents defining the terms, conditions and procedure of individual recruitment during the period under review testify to the continuous monitoring and improvement of the recruitment process by the Doctoral School. The successively increased lower limit of points conditioning the admission to the Doctoral School guarantees an optimally high level of candidates admitted to the Doctoral School.

The admission process includes the needs of people with disabilities, foreigners and graduates from other universities, allowing them to participate on equal terms with other candidates. At their request, the Doctoral School provides the necessary support. The recruitment process is a multi-stage process, but the suitability of candidates is analysed at each stage. The monitoring of the recruitment process is also part of the questionnaire addressed to the doctoral students, in which they evaluate their training at the Doctoral School. It is worth working on expanding the number of academics who meet the internal criteria for PhD supervisors in 'smaller' disciplines, like literary studies or cultural and religious sciences. The Evaluation Committee draws attention to the need to update information on the limits of admission in individual disciplines, because on the University's website the current order on the admission limits regards the 2020/2021 academic year.

Still, the Doctoral School is well prepared in terms of recruitment and selection of candidates, admitting the best candidates who will be able to join the ranks of young researchers in the coming years.

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

Scientific supervision in the evaluated unit takes place throughout the educational process. From the first year, the doctoral student's academic activity is supervised by PhD supervisor and, if need be, an auxiliary supervisor.

The documents presented and the information collected during the inspection allow us to conclude that the cooperation with the supervisor is of a high quality. The rights and obligations of both parties to the scientific activity are stipulated in the Regulations of the Doctoral School.

The procedure of selecting a supervisor raises no concerns. A list of available supervisors is presented on the website. In this context, it is worth emphasizing that the Doctoral School has a significant number of doctoral students who are graduates of other universities, which demonstrates the Doctoral School's openness to individuals from outside the SWPS University. A PhD supervisor can have a maximum of five doctoral students under his/her care. The supervisors' work is relatively undervalued by the University authorities. It is currently counted as six teaching hours per doctoral student per year. We received credible assurances from both PhD supervisors and doctoral students that their actual involvement is far greater, as the supervisors are in regular contact with doctoral students within the Research Centers.

The Doctoral School has introduced a procedure for changing the supervisor, both due to the supervisor's resignation and at the doctoral student's request. A doctoral student may submit one request to change the supervisor during learning cycle, which is a very important and mutually beneficial solution in situations where effective cooperation is impossible. In the event of a conflict between a doctoral student and a supervisor, Representative for mediation and mentoring has been appointed to grant support to both sides of the scientific activity. So far, no serious conflicts have been reported.

Academic supervision at the Doctoral School is very well-organized and implemented in an exemplary manner. Doctoral students are affiliated with one of 33 Research Centers and are under the formal supervision of a PhD supervisor (or academic advisor), while also working under the collective guidance of research teams. The policy of limiting the pool of supervisors to members of active research groups is highly beneficial, as it ensures that doctoral students receive (collective) supervision from the most research-active individuals and can count on support from experts with a wide range of competences and specializations.

The Doctoral School provides support and appropriate conditions for doctoral students with special needs. For example, a doctoral student can extend his or her training due to an illness or the birth and care of a child. The Doctoral School has extensive software for adapting documents to ensure accessibility.

The fact that doctoral students are financially supported in carrying out scientific activities and are able to obtain funds from the University, e.g. to participate in conferences, deserves a particular praise.

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

Similarly to other such institutions, the mid-term evaluation at the Doctoral School is conducted by a three-member Committee. While the supervisor's presence is authorised by the internal regulations of the Doctoral School, Evaluation Committee recommends that the University authorities consider abandoning the practice. Doctoral students at the Doctoral School are informed about the procedures, the course and the characteristics of the mid-term evaluation from the moment they begin their studies. In preparation for the mid-term evaluation, they fill out an "Individual Research Plan Report" which is approved by the supervisor, and attach relevant documents confirming their achievements. The course of the mid-term evaluation and the announcement of the results of the Committee's work described in the Self-Assessment Report prove that the Doctoral School follows fully transparent procedures. The review of the documentation related to the mid-term evaluation made by members of the Evaluation Committee during the inspection also confirms transparency of mid-term evaluation. However, we would like to draw attention to the cases of extremely brief expert comments in the mid-term evaluation reports. Some remarks consist of merely 2 or 3 sentences. It is a good idea to demand more detailed descriptions. After all, the mid-term evaluation is often the last chance to suggest revisions and modifications in the dissertation.

- **Internationalisation:**

The Doctoral School has an English version of its website, where all essential documents regarding the functioning of the Doctoral School are available. Most classes at the Doctoral School are also conducted in English, which ensures the integration of international students. The Doctoral School operates fully within an international academic environment, and the degree of internationalization is considered high. This is confirmed by the lecturers, PhD supervisors, doctoral students and University authorities. The school involves foreign researchers both in the teaching process (although these are isolated cases) and, in some instances, as auxiliary supervisors.

A significant amount of doctoral research projects is carried out as part of international research projects. This ensures international mobility of both doctoral students and academic staff teaching at the Doctoral School. The international activities of doctoral students (internships, visits, conferences) are clearly stated in Individual Research Plans.

The Doctoral School has a transparent internal grant system for both scientific research and participation in international conferences. Travel grant competitions are held quarterly, which provides optimal opportunities for organizing conference trips. It is worth mentioning that the system is highly rated by the doctoral students themselves. For example, last year only a few applications were rejected for formal reasons (badly written applications).

Since 2023, the SWPS University has been a member of European Reform University Alliance (ERUA). While the membership has not yet had a tangible impact on the functioning of the Doctoral School in the evaluated period, there are clear attempts to use the platform for further development of the Doctoral School (e.g. opening new programs). Currently, students can make research visits to allied universities without the application of competition procedure. Thus, it is worth emphasizing the interdisciplinary character of the Doctoral School and the international aspect of the Research Centers within which doctoral students receive their training. The Doctoral School makes every effort to develop international cooperation and engage doctoral students in international scientific activities.

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

Almost 50% of doctoral students who started education at the Doctoral School in the first year of its functioning have already received their doctoral degrees. It is also worth noting that no one has yet been denied the degree. The Doctoral School allows the students to evaluate the quality of education through anonymous surveys concerning cooperation with the supervisors, study programs and classes taught. In addition, the Doctoral Student Government Council participates in the evaluation and the approval of the programs offered. No information was provided on the impact of these surveys on the educational process. The Doctoral School monitors, to the extent possible, the careers of doctoral students, although information on the conclusions drawn from this monitoring is missing. Self-Assessment Report presents the academic achievements of doctoral students from 5 disciplines. They are impressive and, in almost all cases, aim at the practical application of research results.

V. FINAL OPINION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The verification of the Self-assessment Report submitted by the Doctoral School of SWPS University with the information obtained during the inspection conducted at the institution, leads the KEN Evaluation Committee to the following conclusions. The educational process at the Doctoral School meets the criteria provided for level 8 of the Polish Qualifications Framework. The same is true for the subsequent 8 criteria, the cooperation with the doctoral student government and the course of the inspection - all commented upon by the Evaluation Committee in this Report. Reservations and objections included in the Report (regarding the procedures and solutions applied by the Doctoral School) are only recommendations of the Evaluation Committee. We hope that the Doctoral School will consider the validity of the suggested changes, recognizing that they will improve the process of training young researchers which is already good. Overall, we give the institution and the processes of recruiting and training doctoral students a highly positive assessment, recommending that another evaluation of the Doctoral School of SWPS University be conducted in 6 years' time, in accordance with Article 242, para. 5 of the Act of 20 July 2018 The Law on Higher Education and Science (Journal of Laws No. 2024, item 1571, as amended).

VI. ASSESSMENT AND REASON

Final assessment
positive

Reason:

After analysing the Self-evaluation Report and conducting the inspection, the Evaluation Committee appointed by the Chairman of the Science Evaluation Committee has made a positive evaluation of the Doctoral School of SWPS University. Accordingly, it is recommended to conduct another evaluation of this institution in 6 years, in accordance with Article 259, para. 2 of the Act of 20 July 2018 The Law on Higher Education and Science (Journal of Laws of 2024, item 1571, as amended).

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