

DOCTORAL DEGREES AND QUALIFICATIONS IN THE CONTEXTS OF THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA AND THE EUROPEAN RESEARCH AND INNOVATION AREA: POLAND

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THE ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH THE DOCTORATE IS EARNED, AWARDED, AND RECOGNIZED

It is necessary to consider the status of Doctoral students in Poland in the current legal context delineated, in general, by the Law on Higher Education of 1990 and, in particular, by the new Law on Scientific Degrees and Scientific Titles of 2003. But it is also useful to consider the most recent legal proposals (such as the new draft of the Law on Higher Education of May 2003), for there is a chance that these proposals will be implemented as part of a wholesale reform package. Thus, at this point, it is necessary to retain a balance between what is in force and what may be in force, possibly during 2003. Therefore, this study will need further refinements once the new draft law is either passed or rejected (the latter being the fate of the previous ten or so draft laws produced over the past twelve years). Similar uncertainty, although to a much smaller degree, characterizes the future of the other scientific degree that is awarded in Poland, the Habilitation. Should the Habilitation be abolished at some point in the future, the role in academe of the Doctoral Degree, its social and academic status, and possibly its academic requirements and the regulations regarding its award may be different from what prevails today.

It is useful to view Doctoral Degrees in Poland with regard to the new Law on Scientific Degrees and Scientific Titles (2003), *i.e.*, in the context of the Law on Doctoral Degrees, Habilitations, and the Title of Professor. The Doctoral Degree is awarded by those academic units which have had the right to do so conferred on them. This right, in turn, is conferred by the Central Commission for Degrees and Titles, based on the level and scope of the research activities of the given unit and the number of full-time employed academics having Habilitations and the title of Professor. The required number of academics is eight, but the limitation is that they must represent a

given domain of science (or the arts) in which Doctorates are awarded. (In the case of the Habilitation, the requirement is twelve academics meeting the same conditions). Academics need to be working in principal (and not in parallel) positions in a given unit, and may be counted only once, for the above purposes, in a given unit.

It is important to stress that, according to the proposed new law, there are two kinds of higher education institutions in Poland: academic and nonacademic institutions. The difference is that within the former type of institution, at least one unit will have the right to confer Doctoral Degrees. The separation of nonacademic and academic institutions has far-reaching consequences, especially for the booming private sector (for policies for the private sector in Poland, see Kwiek 2003d). In light of the above, the number of private academic institutions is very limited (two out of almost 300 in 2003). Only academic institutions may be represented in the Rectors' Conference (Rectors' Conference of Polish Academic Institutions – KRASP). Also, based on a new proposed law, postgraduate courses would be run only by academic institutions, *i.e.*, by those that have the right to confer Doctoral Degrees.

The Doctoral Degree can be awarded to a person holding an MA, an MSc, or an MD Degree, or an equivalent degree; who has passed Doctoral examinations, and has presented and defended a Doctoral thesis. Doctoral examinations are organized in the fields of main disciplines in which Doctoral theses are written, in additional disciplines, and in foreign languages. A Doctoral thesis may also be a project, a construction, or a technological work, if it meets a more general requirement, that of being an original solution to a scientific problem, and it demonstrates theoretical knowledge of a given discipline in science (or the arts).

The Doctoral defense is conducted and the degree is awarded by the Scientific Council of a faculty or of another type of different academic organizational unit (in the case of higher education institutions) or by a scientific council (in the case of a research institute – *e.g.*, units of the Polish Academy of Sciences). In both cases, the given unit votes on the following: to start a Doctoral defense procedure and to select a supervisor, to select at least two reviewers of the thesis (traditionally, one from the unit and one from the outside), to accept the thesis and to allow it to be defended in public, to accept the public defense, and finally, to confer the Doctoral Degree. A thesis not accepted in one unit may not be defended in another unit. If the Doctoral examinations have not been passed, or the thesis has not been presented in the given time period, the Council may vote to close the Doctoral defense procedure.

The conferring of a Doctoral Degree takes place the moment it is the object of a favourable vote by the Council. (In the case of the Habilitation, the person defending a Habilitation thesis must hold a Doctoral Degree and demonstrate considerable scientific output in addition to the presentation of a Habilitation thesis. The Habilitation thesis may be either a published volume or, much less frequently, an original project, a construction, or a technological or an artistic achievement. There are three reviewers, one traditionally from the unit in which the Habilitation Degree is defended and two from the outside. The conferring of a Habilitation needs to be confirmed by the Central Commission within six months of the Habilitation thesis defense). The supervisor of a PhD thesis and the reviewers of both PhD and Habilitation theses may be habilitated academics or holders of the scientific title of professor. If accepted by the scientific council of a unit in which Doctoral or Habilitation theses are defended, the above

functions may be performed by foreign academics who do not have the above degree or title but are renowned specialists in the given field.

In Poland, Doctoral Degrees are primarily awarded in the best public academic institutions – with universities in the lead – followed by technical universities and academies of medicine. The quantitative trend is that of a large increase in both the numbers of Doctoral students and of degrees awarded. The number of Doctoral students increased ten times between 1990 and 2001: from 2,700 (1990), to 10,500 (1995), and to 28,000 (2001). Also the number of Doctorates awarded increased three times in the same period: from 1,500 (1991), to 2,300 (1995), and to 4,400 (both 2000 and 2001). At the same time, the number of students in both the public and the private sectors of higher education increased more than four times. The number of Doctoral students at the Polish Academy of Sciences is relatively small compared to the number in education institutions – 2.6 percent, as is the number of Doctoral students in research institutes – 1 percent.

Doctoral studies generally last four years and often one more year is added, if necessary, but rarely with stipends. The data about drop-out rates are not available but they do not seem to be high. Admission standards vary from institution to institution, and there is also a difference in admission standards for regular and for extramural students. Extramural (24 percent) are usually fee-paying students. In some disciplines, these students must pass entrance examinations. In other institutions, the first come, first served principle is observed. The use of credit transfer systems is rare if not non-existent, mainly owing to the fact that, so far, Doctoral students are not regarded as students but rather as a group of junior scholars who fall somewhere between students and junior academics employed at the given university. Both national and international mobility of Doctoral students is relatively low; however, international mobility has been increasing in recent years and is certainly more prevalent than national mobility. The number of international Doctoral students is low, 2.5 percent (695 in 2001). Quality assurance mechanisms for Doctoral studies are not formalized. This fact reflects the reality by which, generally speaking, the majority of regular non-fee-paying Doctoral students do not have to do much course work during their Doctoral studies. Frequently, there are no special courses for Doctoral students. Their main attendance at universities is linked to the classes they teach rather than to any they might be taking.

Thus, the formal status of Doctoral students falls somewhere between that of students and of regular academic staff who hold no guarantee of employment after obtaining their Doctoral Degrees. In the New Draft Law on Higher Education (2003), Doctoral students are defined as students in “third level” (BA/BSc, MA/MSc, PhD) studies. Post-Doctoral employees are not recognized as such in Poland. PhD-holders either obtain employment in the education sector (at the position of assistant professor – *adiunkt*) or must leave the public higher education sector, which is very probable, given that the number of new positions in the public education sector is very limited. The recognition of foreign Doctorates is done either through international, bilateral, and multilateral agreements, or by nostrification procedures.

Doctoral students in Poland face several kinds of difficulties and challenges. Fewer than 50 percent of them receive stipends (2001), and the trend is towards fewer stipendiaries and more fee-paying Doctoral students. The chances that the holder of a newly awarded Doctorate will obtain employment in a higher education institution are

very poor. Thus, four years of their study periods are “lost” in terms of the contributions their “employers” will make to their pension schemes. Indeed, they are not actually “employed” with all the consequences of employment for pension benefits.

An academic career today does not offer exciting job prospects in terms of remuneration and available research funding (Altbach 2000, 2002; Enders 2000; Hisman et al. 2002). The labour market for new PhDs in some disciplines is much larger abroad (especially in the United States) than in Poland – a situation that may lead to brain drain. Even though the number of Doctoral students increased tenfold between 1990 and 2001, the number of academic staff members over that period remained relatively stable (between 70,000 and 80,000 academics in both the private and the public sectors). As a result, the chances that new Doctorate-holders could obtain employment in higher education institutions or academies of sciences were reduced considerably. While a decade ago PhDs were produced mainly for the academy, they now, in most cases, must seek employment outside the academic market. A vital change in recent years was the introduction, on a wider scale (25 percent today), of fee-paying extramural Doctoral students. Another dimension of change was the much wider participation of Doctoral students in international mobility schemes, especially within such European Union programmes as the Marie Curie Fellowships.

The law guarantees to those who are not academics but are engaged in Doctoral studies a period of paid leave of twenty-eight days for the preparation of a PhD or a Habilitation thesis. Degrees obtained abroad are equivalent to those obtained in Poland, in the case of countries with which Poland has international agreements. In the cases of countries with which Poland does not have agreements, degrees may be recognized through a procedure known as nostrification.

Foreign scientific degrees are recognized in Poland on the basis of the “Regulation of the Chairman of the Council of Ministers on the Rules and Procedures for Nostrification of Academic Degrees Obtained Abroad” (of July 1991). The procedure for the recognition of Doctoral Degrees is similar to the procedure for the recognition of higher education diplomas. The bodies that can nostrify academic degrees are the councils of faculties that are entitled to only award the Habilitation.

Similarly, academic degrees obtained in those countries with which Poland has signed an agreement on the recognition of diplomas and scientific degrees are recognized automatically. However, some of these agreements (with Syria, Libya, former Yugoslavia, Croatia, Slovenia, Germany, and Austria) only concern the Doctoral Degree (the Habilitation and the title of Professor are excluded). In addition, the agreements with Germany and Austria provide for the recognition of the Doctoral Degree only for academic purposes, (*i.e.*, when the person wants to obtain a higher academic degree in Poland).

There are two ways by which foreign education and foreign degrees are recognized in Poland: through bilateral and multilateral agreements and through nostrification procedures. In the majority of cases in regard to bilateral agreements, the mutual acknowledgements of education and qualifications pertain to both academic and professional purposes. Agreements regarding the mutual recognition of diplomas exist between Poland and the following countries: Armenia, Belarus, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechoslovakia, The Czech Republic, Estonia, The Russian Federation, Yugoslavia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgistan, North Korea, Cuba, Libya, Moldova, Mongolia, Romania,

Slovakia, Syria, Tadzykistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Hungary, Vietnam, and The Soviet Union. Some of these agreements pertain to countries that no longer exist and therefore have legal force only in regard to documents awarded prior to their disintegration (*e.g.*, the Soviet Union – prior to December 1991).

The following multilateral agreements provide the legal grounds for the recognition of scientific degrees (as well as of secondary-school certificates and the degrees of higher education institutions): (i) the 1975 Convention on the Mutual Recongnition of Secondary and Specialized Secondary School Leaving Certificates, of Higher Education Diplomas, as well as of Diplomas Granted for Academic Degrees and Titles – the so-called Prague Convention; (ii) the 1979 UNESCO Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas, and Degrees Concerning Higher Education in the States belonging to the European Region; (iii) the series of Council of Europe Conventions to which Poland was admitted in 1994.

Among the above-mentioned conventions, only the Prague Convention determines an unconditional equivalence of specific types of certificates and degrees issued in the former Soviet bloc countries (secondary school certificates, degrees certifying completion of higher education, and scientific degrees and titles are recognized equally). Other conventions constitute general legal frameworks and encouragement of reciprocal accreditation of educational documents.

The Prague Convention (1975) is one of the legal acts governing the recognition of educational credentials obtained abroad by Poles (the signatories of the Convention are: Bulgaria, Hungary, The Democratic Republic of Vietnam, North Korea, The German Democratic Republic, Cuba, Mongolia, Poland, Romania, The Soviet Union, and Czechoslovakia. These countries agreed to mutually recognize the credentials of general secondary education, vocational secondary education, higher education, and academic degrees and titles. In April 2000, The Czech Republic seceded from the convention).

THE EMPLOYMENT OF DOCTORATE-HOLDERS

The situation of PhD students needs to be viewed in the general perspective of the academic profession in Poland, particularly in terms of the number of academic staff members and of the structure of employment (for a wider picture, see Kwiek 2003b, 2003c). The number of full-time faculty members in Polish public higher education institutions during the 2001-2002 academic year was 70,000, and the number of non-academic staff, 63,000. In private institutions, there were 9,000 faculty and 7,000 non-academic staff, giving a general proportion between the public and the private sector of 8 to 1 (all numbers given here and below are rounded to the nearest thousand). Of 70,000 faculty members in the public sector, 13,000 (19 percent) are full professors and independent academics (those holding the Habilitation), 43,000 (61 percent) are assistant and associate professors (those holding PhD and MA Degrees), 13,000 (18 percent) are senior lecturers and lecturers (some of them holding Doctoral Degrees) and 1,000 are foreign language instructors and instructors. These figurers do not include part-time faculty and staff.

Table 1. Academic faculty and staff in Poland 1997-2001 (full-time)

Year	Total faculty	Professors	Associate professors	Assistant professors	Lecturers and instructors	Non-academic staff
2001	79,080	16,734	30,545	16,791	15,020	69,395
2000	80,208	16,400	29,654	17,844	16,312	68,056
1999	78,091	15,562	28,371	18,258	15,900	67,972
1998	74,379	14,264	26,663	18,263	15,189	64,548
1997	73,328	13,659	25,526	18,832	15,095	64,932

Source: *Higher Education Institutions and Their Finances* (various years).

Over the past six years (1997-2002), the total number of academic faculty numbers in both the private and the public sectors remained more or less unchanged, between 70,000 and 80,000 persons. The numbers of part-time staff numbers are marginal in both sectors (4 percent in total in 2001), which means that almost all academics are employed full-time.

It is also interesting to observe the structure of the Polish academic profession with reference to the type of institution. The largest numbers of academics are employed at universities (31 percent), then in technical universities (23 percent), and then in two types of academies: of medicine and of economics (11 percent each).

If one observes the private sector, it is interesting to note that the only type of institution in which the number of academics is larger in the private sector than in the public sector is the economics academy. These institutions employ 65 percent of the academics working in the private sector. At the same time, almost 60 percent of all academics employed in the private sector work in academies of economics.

This particular detail, however, needs to be viewed in perspective. It is generally very easy (and marketable) for an institution to give itself the label of academy of economics, especially at the undergraduate level. Therefore, the majority of private institutions use this label. At the same time, it is very difficult to state how many academics work only in the private sector. An informed guess is that the higher up the academic ladder, the fewer; so that, finally, among the private sector academics, a large number of junior staff members may be working only in this sector. For senior academics, and especially full professors, such a situation is very exceptional (except for *professors emeriti*).

Table 2. Academic faculty and staff in Poland, by type of institution and mode of employment (2001)

	Public	Private	Total (public and private)
Full-time	70,222	8,858	79,080
Part-time	2,144	1,092	3,236
Total (full-time and part-time)	72,366	9,950	

Source: *Higher Education Institutions and Their Finances* (2002).

Table 3. Academic faculty and staff in Poland, by type of institution (2001)

Higher education institutions	Total	Public	Private
Universities	25,478	24,664	814
Polytechnics	18,046	17,777	269
Academies of agriculture	5,469	5,449	20
Academies of economics	8,756	3,102	5,654
Pedagogical academies	3,815	3,403	412
Academies of medicine	8,817	8,817	0
Marine academies	592	592	0
Academies of physical sciences	1,578	1,578	0
Academies of the arts	2,679	2,613	66
Academies of theology	684	61	623
Remaining academies	1,000	0	1,000
Military academies	1,625	1,625	0

Source: *Higher Education Institutions and Their Finances* (2002).

THE DOCTORATE AND THE HABILITATION

Two scientific degrees can be earned in Poland: the Doctorate and the Habilitation. To put it succinctly, in the Polish structure of higher education, the Habilitation opens the way from being junior faculty to being senior faculty; however, full seniority of rank is only achieved with the award of the scientific title of professor. The Habilitation, however, opens the way for an academic to become a university professor (a university function, without a scientific title). Background information on numbers, sex, and distribution among disciplines or Doctorates is given and discussed below. In the Polish context, it may also be useful to combine these data with data concerning the Habilitation.

Over the past four years, there have been significant discussions about the future of the Habilitation in the training of faculty and in the academic career in general. Although opinions have varied, the status quo with regard to the existence of the two scientific degrees has been maintained and promoted for future legislative projects. The strongest support for the abolition of the Habilitation seems to be coming from trade union circles, and the strongest opposition, from senior faculty who fear an (apparently unavoidable) lowering of academic standards (at least for as long as the standards for Doctoral dissertations are not simultaneously raised).

The number of all Doctoral Degrees (and Habilitations) awarded in Poland, in 2001, in higher education institutions, institutes of the Polish Academy of Sciences, and in research and development institutes was 4,400 and 755, respectively. Interestingly enough, 60,000 people in Poland are claiming that they hold PhD Degrees. Of these, slightly more than 41,000 were working in public higher education institutions in 1999. Although people holding PhD Degrees are distributed among

higher education institutions and research institutions and can be found in industry and administration, the main places for the promotion of Doctorates are in public higher education institutions. Only two private higher education institutions currently have the right to award Doctoral Degrees; however, the waiting list of institutions requesting the right to do so is already long.

Table 4. Doctorates awarded in Poland (between 1991-2001)

Academic year	Total
1991	1,500
1993	2,000
1994	2,300
1995	2,300
1996	2,400
1997	2,600
1998	3,499
1999	4,000
2000	4,400
2001	4,400

Source: Higher Education Institutions and Their Finances (various years).

The number of Doctoral Degrees awarded annually over the last twenty-five years varied, from almost 4,000 per year during the second half of the 1970s, to about 3,000 during the first half of the 1980s, with another decline in the second half of the 1980s and the first half of the 1990s to an average of about 2,000 per year. Interestingly enough, by the end of the 1990s, the number has risen sharply, once again, to a level higher than ever before – exactly 4,000 in 1999 and then 4,400 in both 2000 and 2001 (strictly speaking, the number of Doctorates was the following: 1,500 (1991), 2,000 (1993), 2,300 (1994), 2,300 (1995), 2,400 (1996), 2,600 (1997), 3,499 (1998), 4,000 (1999), 4,400 (2000) and 4,400 (2001). The “safe” annual rate of “production” of Doctorates per year, needed merely to continue the biological regeneration of this category of potential academic faculty, was set in government and independent policy reports at 3,000, taking into account a relatively high number of Polish Doctorate-holders wishing to leave the country. Obviously, the total number of Doctorates awarded in 2001 indicates a trend of earning advanced credentials, but it does not reveal a general inflow of new Doctorate-holders into the higher education system.

To put the matter into a nutshell, the number of Doctorate-holders is increasing, but the number of those wishing and being able to begin academic careers is decreasing. In 2001, the largest percentage of recipients of Doctorates were aged between 31 and 35 (37 percent), between 27 and 30 (28 percent), and between 36 and 40 (16 percent). The youngest recipients of Doctoral Degrees, 26 years of age and less, represent 0.70 percent, and the oldest, 51 years of age, represent 5 percent. So far as types of institutions are concerned, the largest proportion in the production of Doctoral Degrees, not surprisingly, consists of universities (38 percent), followed by academies of medicine (19 percent), and technical universities (18 percent).

Table 5. Doctorates awarded in Poland, by age of recipients (2001)

	Age						
	26 and less	27-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46-50	51 and over
4,400	30	1,239	1,611	684	374	243	219

Source: *Higher Education Institutions and Their Finances* (2002).

Table 6. Doctorates awarded in Poland by type of institution (2001)

Type of institution	Number of Doctorates
Universities	1,650
Academies of Medicine	852
Technical universities	780
Academies of Agriculture	358
Academies of Economics	172
Military schools	136
Academies of Physical Education	70

Source: *Higher Education Institutions and Their Finances* (2002).

The distribution by sex of Doctorates (and Habilitations) clearly favours men, with women being awarded 41 percent of the former (out of 4,400 in 2001), but only 29 percent of the latter (out of 755 in 2001). While in the case of Doctorates, the number of degrees awarded in the university system more or less equals the number of degrees awarded in institutions controlled by other ministries, in the case of Habilitations, it is the university system that is in the lead, awarding as many as one-third of all Habilitations.

Table 7. Doctoral students in Poland (1990-2001)

Year	Total	Women	Foreign nationals
2001	28,345	12,873	695
2000	25,622	11,315	710
1999	22,239	9,713	775
1998	19,735	8,280	579
1997	16,419	6,822	718
1996	13,351	5,252	806
1995	10,782	-	715
1994	7,133	-	684
1993	4,428	-	632
1990	2,695	-	482

Source: *Higher Education Institutions and Their Finances* (various years).

In regard to the disciplines in which the two degrees are awarded: the single most significant domain for Doctorates consists of the medical sciences, in which over a quarter of all Doctorates were awarded in 2001 (26 percent), followed by the Humanities (19 percent), and the Technical Sciences (19 percent). In the case of the Habilitation, which opens the way for the academic positions of university professor

and full professor, the most dynamic disciplines are the Humanities (22 percent), followed by the Medical and the Technical Sciences (16 percent each).

Table 8. Doctorates awarded in Poland by field of study (2000)

Field of study	Number of Doctorates
Chemistry	238
Economics	317
Pharmacy	50
Physics	128
Humanities	867
Forestry	30
Mathematics	78
Medicine	897
Law	99
Agriculture	350
Technical Sciences	726
Theology	141
Veterinary Sciences	32
Physical Sciences	70
Military Sciences	40
Biology	249
Geology	88
Total	4,400

Source: *Higher Education Institutions and Their Finances* (various years).

The Habilitation serves as a demarcation point between junior (or auxiliary) faculty and senior (or independent) faculty, no matter how long it takes for habilitated academics to become university professors. In the 1990s, several attempts were embodied in projected draft laws on higher education to abolish the Habilitation, but the attempts were very unfavourably received by the academic community, especially by senior academics. Most likely, the degree will not be abolished, if one can judge from the latest legal proposals.

Table 9. Habilitations in Poland by age of holders (2001)

	Age				
	31-35	36-40	41-45	46-50	51 and over
755	23	73	180	208	271

Source: *Higher Education Institutions and Their Finances* (2002).

Table 10. Habilitations in Poland in terms of time elapsed between the award of the Doctorate and the award of the Habilitation (2001)

Total	2 years and less	3-8 years	9 years and over
753	2	14	737

Source: *Higher Education Institutions and Their Finances* (2002).

In very broad terms, and before a new law on higher education is introduced, junior faculty members cannot have tenure, while senior faculty members are tenured. From a legal perspective, junior faculty may be removed from the public higher education system if they fail to write and defend a Habilitation dissertation within nine to twelve years after completion of a Doctoral thesis. Senior faculty members are currently guaranteed the equivalent of academic tenure.

Professors in the public sector are not state employees, as is common in Western Europe. There is no automatic progression up the ranks in public higher education. Still, the most important factor is research rather than teaching, and passage from junior to senior rank is guaranteed by the award of the Habilitation.

The Habilitation, until fairly recently, guaranteed, with the passage of time, the post of university professor, granted initially for five years and then renewed for life. But as the number of Habilitations is growing, and the number of university professors within a given department may not, according to internal regulations accepted in the public sector, exceed the number of full professors by more than 20 percent, in practice, the number of habilitated faculty not holding positions of university professor may certainly be growing.

DOCTORAL STUDENTS

In the Polish higher education system, as mentioned above, Doctoral students are situated between students and junior academic faculty. They have some of the privileges of faculty members, including social security, four weeks of summer holidays, reduced train fares, etc., but do not receive regular salaries and contributions to their pension schemes are not paid. Some of them receive Doctoral stipends, on a competitive basis, generally equal to an Assistant's salary (but with exemption from taxation). At the same time, Doctoral students have poor chances of being employed in the public academic sector, for the number of positions available is very low in the vast majority of disciplines.

The system of public higher education is relatively closed for new entrants to the profession. Regular Doctoral studies have a duration of four years, with the option of an additional year. The most recent data available for Polish higher education (for 2001) indicate that the overall number of Doctoral students is 28,000, including 13,000 women. Over 90 percent of Doctoral students attend public institutions (26,000, with 2,200 enrolled in private sector institutions). Fewer than 50 percent of Doctoral students receive Doctoral stipends (13,000), with as few as 165 stipendiaries in the private sector. Almost half of all Doctoral students are enrolled in universities (13,000) and some 7,000 Doctoral students are enrolled in technical universities.

Table 11. Doctoral students in Poland by type of higher education institution (2001)

Higher education institutions	Numbers of Doctoral students
Public	26,143
Private	2,202
Total	28,345

Source: *Higher Education Institutions and Their Finances* (2002).

Table 12. Doctoral students in Poland, by field of study (2001)

Field of study	Number of Doctoral students
Chemistry	1,147
Economics	3,365
Pharmacy	70
Physics	975
Geography	94
Humanities	6,770
Forestry	171
Mathematics	447
Medicine	1,666
Natural Sciences	3
Law	1,605
Agriculture	2,288
Technical Sciences	6,525
Theology	1,127
Veterinary Medicine	200
Physical Sciences	222
Military Sciences	115
Biology	1,004
Geology	551
Total	28,345

Source: *Higher Education Institutions and Their Finances* (2002).

Although the number of Polish Doctoral students has expanded steadily each year over the last thirteen years, the number of foreign Doctoral students has remained more or less unchanged, varying between 500 and 800 each year, with almost 500 in 1990, 700 in 1995, and again 700 in 2001. Despite the immense expansion in the enrollments in Polish institutions, the number of foreigners willing to undertake Doctoral studies in Poland seems very limited today and in fact decreased from 18 percent in 1990 to 2.5 percent in 2001. There are three areas in which the number of Doctoral students is very large: the Humanities (24 percent), the technical sciences (23 percent), and economics (12 percent).

Current research on junior faculty and Doctoral students indicates that only 20 percent of both categories are interested in pursuing academic careers. The remaining 80 percent want to bring advanced credentials to the labour market or, more often, do not any have idea as to what they want to do in professional life, hoping to have additional time in which to choose (a widespread feeling of “negative selection” exists for Doctoral studies in certain disciplines; in other, more marketable disciplines, paid Doctoral studies exist, in which the expected level of achievement of Doctoral students is very low and no exceptional abilities are required). Very few Doctoral students are interested in academic teaching.

Traditionally, Doctoral education has been oriented toward the training of professors for higher education, *i.e.*, university teaching and scientific research. As Roger Geiger stated with respect to the United States, “the PhD as it stands today

represents *too much* training for many potential consumers of graduate education; yet it is *too little* training for its traditional role of preparing future faculty” (Geiger, 1997, 248). Both in the United States and in Poland, a sharp rise in the number of Doctoral students took place in the 1990s. But while in the United States, the balance between the supply and demand of Doctorates raised some concerns, in Poland the question was generally neglected. If one compares the relatively closed public higher education system and the reduced opportunities opened to recent PhDs in the private higher education sector, the current number of Doctoral students – 28,000 – seems to be proof of overproduction, when viewed from a traditional perspective. From a changed perspective, however, universities and Doctoral students view Doctoral education as a way of increasing one’s chances of finding employment outside academe on the highly competitive Polish labour market. Four years of study represent a long period in many professions; however, it should be remembered that the vast majority of Doctoral course programmes do not require the payment of tuition fees, and 13,000 Doctoral candidates (slightly fewer than 50 percent) receive government-funded Doctoral stipends. In the long run, the present situation is bound to change, probably with the lowering of the status of Doctoral candidates to that of simple students (as a result of the Bologna Process) and the introduction of tuition fees. The current system leaves the burden of Doctoral education with the universities, as no special funding is made available to them: PhD candidates are treated as students and are funded accordingly.

There are currently two ways to earn a Doctoral Degree in Poland: enrolling in doctoral studies or writing a dissertation independently and defending it at some university or research institute. The latter option is extremely rare but legally possible. Also, in certain higher education institutions, there still are assistants (employed by the institution) who are working on their dissertations. At the best universities, however, it is not possible to be employed prior to having a completed Doctoral Degree. The cost of the defense procedure and two reviews is currently estimated at around 1,000 USD and is covered by the institution in which Doctoral studies are undertaken. In the case of independent Doctoral students, the cost has to be covered by the applicant.

Doctoral studies may be organized by those academic units which have the right to confer Habilitations, *i.e.*, those which have at least twelve senior academics in a given discipline of the science or the arts. As has been indicated above, they are of two kinds: regular and extramural. Only regular doctoral studies are free of charge to the student. Doctoral students enrolled in regular doctoral studies are obliged to teach classes in their institutions, but these may not represent more than 120 hours per academic year. Doctoral students are entitled to eight weeks of summer holidays, basic social security, and healthcare contributions. They are eligible to receive Doctoral stipends (which are guaranteed to be no lower than 60 percent of an assistant’s salary). Doctoral students who do not receive stipends may be employed and do additional work. Those who receive stipends need permission to do additional work and may not work full time.

THE FUTURE OF DOCTORAL STUDIES

Although doctoral studies are a significant issue in discussions about the creation of the European Higher Education Area and a European Research and Innovation Area,

especially among those concerned with studies of the academic profession, the issue, as such, has not been widely discussed in Poland. Although the trends are clear (increases in numbers, a decreasing percentage of government-funded stipends, a decreasing percentage of international Doctoral students, increased opportunities for fee-paying Doctoral students, and relatively closed access to positions in higher education institutions), the future of Doctoral study is uncertain in terms of its missions, tasks, and role in the higher education sector. Also, there is no vision in Poland relative to the use of Doctoral studies as an instrument for working in Poland towards the knowledge-based economy of the (future) Europe of Knowledge.

A short glance at two figures: the number of academics (80,000) and the number of Doctoral students (28,000), combined with the background information that the number of academics has not changed substantially in recent ten years or so, leads to the conclusion that the future of Doctoral students is certainly not, at least in the coming years, going to be in academe.

The situation of young Doctorate-holders is a reflection of the situation of the whole academic sector in Poland. A temporary solution for young PhDs might be the introduction of certain post-Doctoral programmes and considerably greater flexibility in employment procedures. Currently, there are almost no opportunities for recent Doctorate-holders to obtain temporary contracts under research grants or to become involved in post-Doctoral training or research in any other way than through full-time employment. Also, more stringent regulations concerning principal and parallel employment (about to be introduced into the new Law on Higher Education) may open ways to positions in the private educational sector. The current situation is that of the production of Doctoral students mainly for the outside labour market – which is good but which requires different kinds of doctoral programmes from those traditionally focused on providing new entrants to the academic profession.

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